DECEMBER

Famous FANTASTIC Mysteries

25¢

POPULAR PUBLICATIONS

HREE GO BACK
THRILLING COMPLETE NOVEL
by J. LESLIE MITCHELL

THE DERELICT
WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON

STORIES IN THIS ISSUE ARE ENTIRELY NEW OR HAVE NEVER BEFORE APPEARED IN A MAGAZINE

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Lieutenant in Signal Corps

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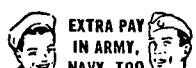

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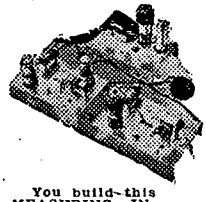

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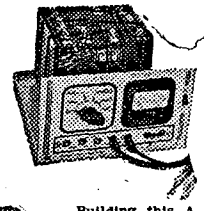

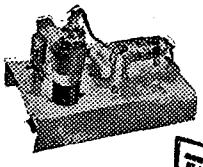

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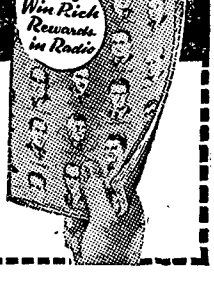

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Famous FANTASTIC Mysteries

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VOL. V | DECEMBER, 1943 | No. 5

Full Book-Length Novel

Three Go Back — **J. Leslie Mitchell** — 8

Plunged from today into the dawn of time, three castaways into the past wage the strangest fight mankind has known, to get back across twenty thousand years with the message that can bring the lost Golden Age to their descendants!

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Short Stories

The Derelict — **William Hope Hodgson** — 94

Doomed men they were, caught in a dread phenomenon of Nature run amok. . . . What was the hideous secret of the Bheotpte—the derelict ship that no man could board and live?

First magazine rights purchased from the estate of the author.

The Mask — **Robert W. Chambers** — 109

Barred from life and death, she waited—waited for the key that could unlock the sinister talisman which held her prisoner of eternity!

King of the Gray Spaces — **Ray Bradbury** — 120

Chosen . . . one out of a million . . . for only the best could be trusted with the lives of travelers in the space lanes between the planets. . . . This is the story of how one boy received the summons—and how he answered it.

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All the stories in this publication are either new or have never appeared in a magazine.

Published quarterly by All-Fiction Field, Inc., 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, 16, Ill. Editorial and executive offices, 205 East Forty-second Street, New York City, 17. Harry Steeger, President and Secretary. Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice President and Treasurer. Second class entry pending at Post Office, Chicago, Ill.

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Single copy price 25c. Yearly subscription $1.00 in United States, its dependencies, and Mexico and Cuba. Other countries, $1.35. Subscription Dept. 205 E. 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. For advertising rates address Sam J. Perry, 205 E. 42nd St., New York, N. Y. When submitting manuscripts kindly enclose self-addressed stamped envelope for their return if found unavailable and send them to Editorial Dept., 205 E. 42nd St., New York, N. Y. The publishers cannot accept responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts, although care will be exercised in handling them.

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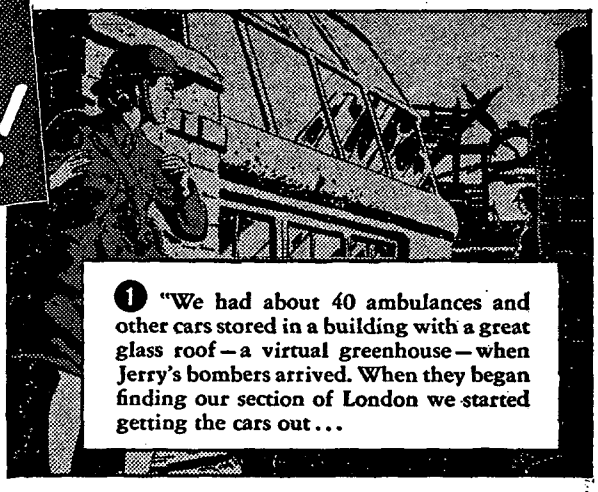
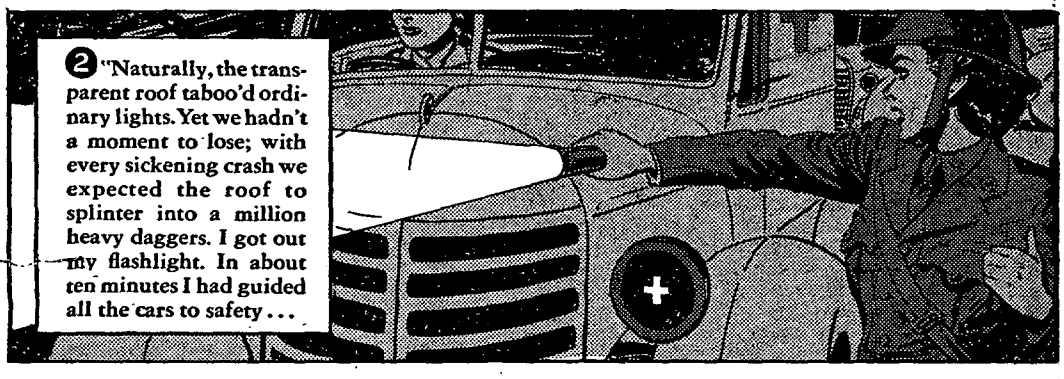
BLITZED IN A GREENHOUSE!

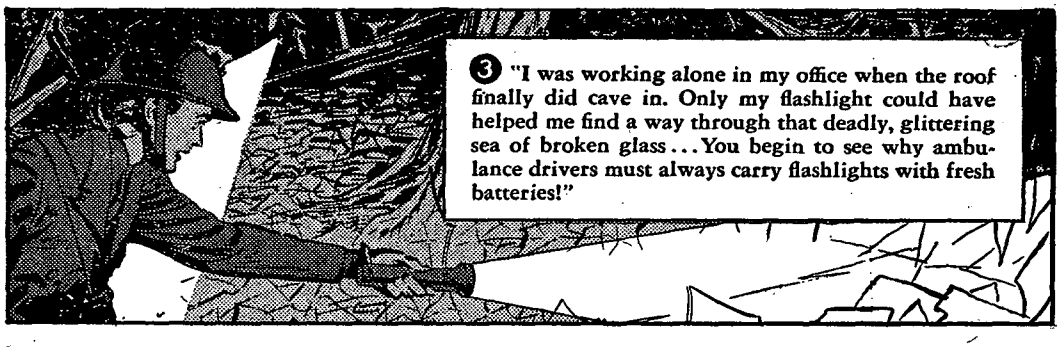
(The exciting experience of Margaret Bridges, of the London Auxiliary Ambulance service, during one of London's heaviest raids. Pretty, attractive 30-year-old Miss Bridges is part English, part American. She volunteered for the ambulance service, reporting for duty just three days before war was declared.)



1 "We had about 40 ambulances and other cars stored in a building with a great glass roof—a virtual greenhouse—when Jerry's bombers arrived. When they began finding our section of London we started getting the cars out...



2 "Naturally, the transparent roof taboo'd ordinary lights. Yet we hadn't a moment to lose; with every sickening crash we expected the roof to splinter into a million heavy daggers. I got out my flashlight. In about ten minutes I had guided all the cars to safety...



3 "I was working alone in my office when the roof finally did cave in. Only my flashlight could have helped me find a way through that deadly, glittering sea of broken glass...You begin to see why ambulance drivers must always carry flashlights with fresh batteries!"

Your dealer may have no "Eveready" flashlight batteries. If so, please don't blame him—almost the entire supply is currently going to the armed forces and those war industries with the highest priority ratings.

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The Readers' Viewpoint

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, Popular Publications, 205 East 42nd st., New York, 17, New York.

WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON

Author of "The Derelict"

WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON is recognized as one of the great fantasy writers of all time. Among his best known works are "The Night Land," "The House on the Borderland," "The Ghost Pirates," "The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'," and "Carnacki the Ghost Finder."

He had an active and adventurous life, a long service with the British Merchant Marine, and was killed in action in the World War, as a second lieutenant in the R.A.F., at Ypres.

To a friend he wrote of himself: "Eight years at sea, three times around the world, ten years an author, and now two and a half years a soldier."

In one of his last letters he wrote: "Shells bursting all around us, and yet one did not seem to care, hardly even noticed them. The moment was too intense, tremendous—looked forward to, through weary months, with hope and expectation and some wonder and perhaps dread lest one should fall short—and then in a moment the event was upon us . . . and that with gun-firing with two of us loading it, firing a round every three seconds, and even faster, I should say. The whole road where the Germans were coming around the end of a wood was simply one roar of dust and smoke where our shells were striking."

His knowledge of men and places, of the sea, and of the most minute details concerning ships are reflected in the confident, colorful writing in his stories, which though they nearly all are in some way weird or fantastic, gain everything by their authenticity of background.

One of the most powerful of these sea fantasies is "The Ghost Pirates" which was first published in 1909, and which will appear in a future issue of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. While there is some difference of opinion upon which of Mr. Hodgson's stories is the greatest, this particular one has been evaluated as "powerful" and contains the greatest amount of sustained adventure and eerie bloodcurdling occurrences. The atmosphere of his sea stories resembles in many ways that of Philip M. Fisher, who has been such a favorite with F.F.M. readers.

The Editor.

MOORE STORY SUPERB

Dear Editor:

Another Finlay—another girl. The same old story with a few necessary changes. I am frankly beginning to loose my faith in Virgil's ability; beginning to wonder if he has lost his medium. The once carefully drawn and planned pictures are fading into an indistinct mesh of sloppy cross-hatching and dot-work. The scratch-board drawings, once so effective, have now given Finlay a way to illustrate quickly and with ease. The atmosphere they once lent the magazine is gone with an overabundance of them. 'Tis a sad day when even Finlay does not measure up to standard.

Lawrence however, does meet with the requirements of that standard. A standard set by himself with his past illustrations in Super Science, all of which showed definite promise—that promise is now fulfilled. The gracefulness of the drawing for *"Doorway Into Time"* is superb. The girl's hands are a rhapsody in movement. Her whole body swings with a rhythmic beat heretofore uncaptured by any fantasy artist. This artist presents a fresh aspect of Finlay's style, which has become awfully stereotyped and recent mediocre.

As for Bok—I'm surprised beyond words at his offering in the September issue.

Trick art! Oooh. . . . In F.F.M., the elite mag of the pulps! I can pick up almost any newspaper comic strip and searching through it find something along the same order. When I first saw it I bleated to the newsdealer, "Look at that Bok—isn't it a mastery in rhythm?" He nodded and turned back to his work but I went home thoroughly enthralled. Then, over in Oakland, Tom Wright was showing the picture to George Ebey and pointing with joyful finger to the illustration. "Look at that George, look at that. Those two faces. Pretty damn clever of Bok, heh?" George turned sick and came over and pointed the fact out to me. I turned sick. The fact had gone unnoticed by myself, who was quite fascinated with the four very clever and very modern figures composing the center of the picture. Now I have eyes only for the two faces; they leap out of the page at me whenever I look at the drawing. No more even remotely resembling this in the future, please.

Can see no reason for the publication of Nanek's poem, *Dwellers in the Mirage*. No metre can be found, no rhythm, no nothing. The best Finlay in the issue, however, including the cover.

Would like to know what has happened to Paul in recent issues. The fellow seems to have disappeared, much to my disappointment. Paul has the most distinctive style of any artist in the pulp field, outside of Bok.

Would like to see the publication of *"The Wind that Tramps the World."* Never read it myself—but almost every fan I have ever

(Continued on page 119)

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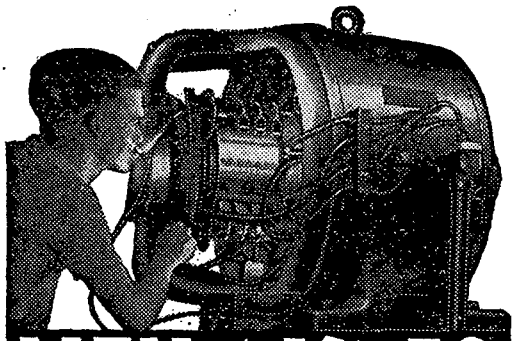

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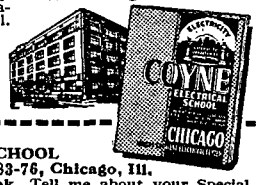

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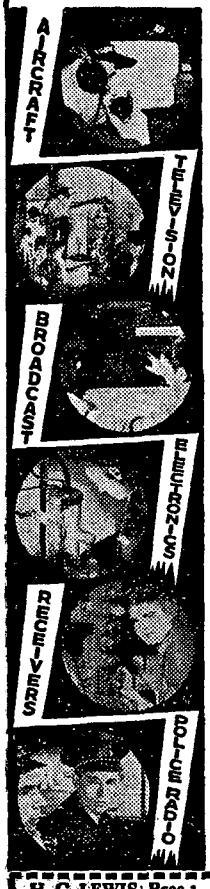

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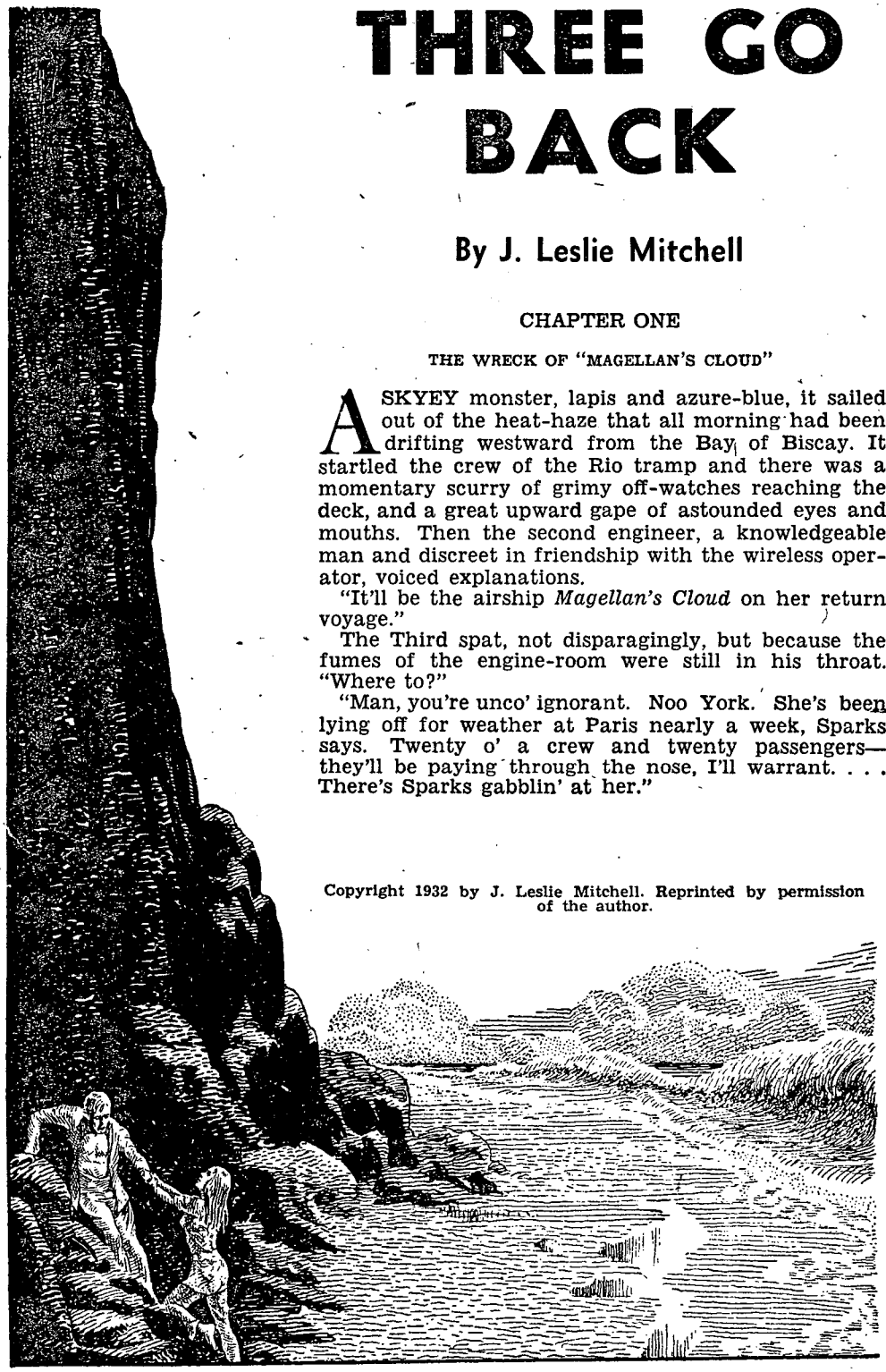

THREE GO BACK

By J. Leslie Mitchell

CHAPTER ONE

THE WRECK OF "MAGELLAN'S CLOUD"

A SKYEY monster, lapis and azure-blue, it sailed out of the heat-haze that all morning had been drifting westward from the Bay of Biscay. It startled the crew of the Rio tramp and there was a momentary scurry of grimy off-watches reaching the deck, and a great upward gape of astounded eyes and mouths. Then the second engineer, a knowledgeable man and discreet in friendship with the wireless operator, voiced explanations.

"It'll be the airship *Magellan's Cloud* on her return voyage."

The Third spat, not disparagingly, but because the fumes of the engine-room were still in his throat. "Where to?"

"Man, you're unco' ignorant. Noo York. She's been lying off for weather at Paris nearly a week, Sparks says. Twenty o' a crew and twenty passengers—they'll be paying through the nose, I'll warrant. . . . There's Sparks gabblin' at her."

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Plunged from Today into the dawn of time, three castaways into the past wage the strangest fight mankind has known, to get back across twenty thousand years with the message that can bring the lost Golden Age to their descendants.

A subdued buzz and crackle. A tapping that presently ceased. High up against a cloudless sky, the airship quivered remoter in the Atlantic sunshine. The Third spat again, forgetfully.

"Pretty thing," he said.

The Rio tramp chugged northeastward. One or two of the crew still stood on deck, watching the aerial voyageur blend with the August sunhaze and the bubble walls of seascape till it disappeared.

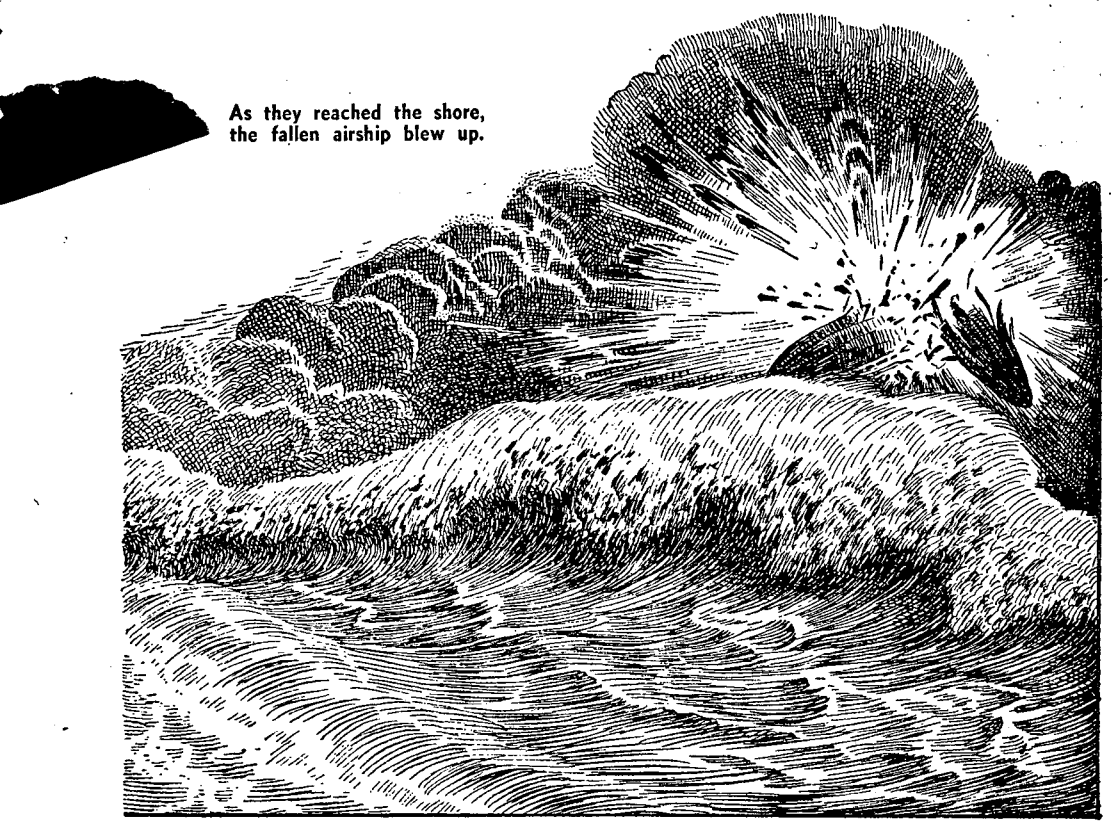
And that was the last the world ever saw of the airship *Magellan's Cloud.*

CLAIR STRANLAY could not forget her fiancé who had died on the wire outside Mametz.

A series of chance encounters and casual conversations overhead had filled out in tenebrous vignettes each letter of the cryptic notice, Killed in Action. He had died very slowly and reluctantly, being a boy and anxious to live, and unaware that civilization has its prices. . . . And at intervals, up into the coming of the morning, they had heard him calling in delirium:

"Clair! *Oh, Clair!*"

Fourteen years ago. And still a look, a book, a word could set in motion the little disks of memory in her mind, and his voice, in its own timbre and depth and accent, would come ringing to her across the years in that cry of agony. . . . She



As they reached the shore, the fallen airship blew up.

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thought, stirring from the verge of sleep in her chair of the *Magellan's* deserted passengers' lounge, "What on earth made me think of that now?"

". . .No, madam, quite definitely I've nothing to say about my deportation from Germany."

"Oh, please, Doctor Sinclair, do give your side of the case. Just a part. I'm Miss Kemp of the C. U. P., you know, and it would be rather a scoop for me. Shame to miss it."

"I've nothing to say. And I'll be obliged if you'll stop pestering me."

"Oh, very well."

An angry staccato of heel taps broke out and approached. Clair, deep in her basket-chair, saw the doorway to the swinging galley blind for a moment its glimpse of ultramarine skyscape. Miss Kemp, short, sandy, stocky, stood with flushed face, biting her lips inelegantly. Then, catching sight of Clair, she came across the cabin in her religiously acquired svelte-glide. Clair thought, with an inward groan, "Oh, my good God, now I am in for it."

She closed her eyes, as if dozing. Unavailingly. The near basket-chair creaked under the ample, svelte-molded padding of Miss Kemp.

"Here me try the beast? You're not asleep, are you? I saw your eyes open. . . . Hear me tackle him? Hope I'm not disturbing you. . . . Beast! Hear his answers? But I'll give him a write-up that'll make him and his precious league squirm, though. Dirty deportee."

"Dirty what?" Clair opened reluctant eyes.

"Deportee. Haven't you heard of him?"

"Quite likely. Who is he?"

"Why, Keith Sinclair, the agitator who's been traveling about Europe organizing the League of Militant Pacifists. Says that another war's inevitable with the present drift of things."

"Sounds logical." Clair thought: "And I hope I sound bored enough. . . . No result? Oh, well." Aloud: "And what happened?"

"Haven't you heard? He was kicked out of Italy a month ago and deported from Germany last week."

"What fun! And where's he going now?"

"Beast. To jail, I hope. Returning to America in a hurry to attend some demonstration in Boston." Miss Kemp's chair creaked its relief as she rose. "Hear that Sir John Mullaghan's on board?"

"I'm awfully weak on the auricular verb. . . . Never heard of him at all."

"Oh, you *must* have. Awfully important. Conservative M. P. Head of the armaments people. I'm off to get his opinion of the trip. Rather amusing, you know; he and Sinclair have met before."

"Have they?"

"Didn't you hear? Awful shindy. Sir John was making a speech at some place in Berlin. Said there would always be wars and that honest men prepared for them. Sinclair stood up in the audience and interrupted and started a speech of his own. Police had to interfere, and that led to his deportation. Sinclair's, I mean. Wonder if Sir John knows he's on board the *Magellan?*"

"I haven't heard."

"Will be a scoop if they say anything when they meet! Did you hear—oh, there's Sir John crossing to the steering cabin. I'll get him now."

Clair cautiously raised the eyelids below her penciled brows. Like talking to the bound files of the *News-Chronicle.* The lounge was empty, the passengers in their cabins or on the galleries. Miss Kemp's high-heeled footfalls receded. . . . . Blessed relief. Please God, why did you make Miss Kemps?

That article in *Literary Portrai*[redacted] ten by Miss Kemp about herself, [redacted] sheer claw, Clair remembered.

BEST-SELLER FROM THE SLU[redacted]

Miss Clair Stranlay, whose real name is Elsie Moggs . . . born in a tenement house in Battersea . . . best-seller in England and America. . . .

Most of it true enough, of course. Except for the Elsie Moggs bit. A bad mix-up that on Miss Kemp's part when searching out antecedents in Thrush Road. She'd missed the story of how fond Stranlay *mère* had been of novelettes—even to the extent of christening her daughter out of one of them. . . .

Romance! Romance that had beckoned so far away beyond the kindly poverty of Thrush Road!

"My dear girl, you came this voyage for rest, not reminiscence. Now's your time."

But not even the *Magellan's* soothing motion could recapture that drowsiness from which the sound of Miss Kemp's attempted interviewing had evicted her. She thought, with a laggard curiosity, "Wonder if the Sinclair man is the one with the beard and false front who ate so

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hard at lunch? Throat-cutting is probably hungry work. Let's look."

And, as idly as that, she was afterward to reflect, she stood up and strolled out of the *Magellan's* lounge and out of the twentieth century.

BELOW her, trellis-work of wood and aluminum and, in the interstices, the spaces of the sun-flooded ocean. The beat of the engines astern sounded remote and muffled. There was not a cloud.

Then, raising her eyes, she saw Keith Sinclair for the first time. He turned with blown hair at the moment, glanced at her uninterestedly, looked away, looked back again. He scowled at her with the sun in his eyes.

He saw a woman who might have been anything from twenty-five to thirty years of age, and who, as a matter of data, was thirty-three. She was taller than most men liked, with that short-cut, straight brown hair which has strands and islets of red in it. And indeed, that red spread to her eyelashes, which were very long, though Sinclair did not discover this until afterward, and to her eyes, which had once been blue before the gold-red came into them. Nose and chin, said Sinclair's mind methodically, very good, both of them. She can breathe, which is something. Half the women alive suffer from tonsillitis. But that mouth . . . And he definitely disapproved of the pursed, long-lipped mouth in the lovely face—the mouth stained scarlet.

"Weather keeping up," said Clair helpfully.

He said, "Yes."

She thought, "My dear man, I don't want to interview you. Only to collect you as a comic character. Sorry you haven't that beard."

Nearly six feet three inches in height, too long in the leg and too short in the body. All his life, indeed, there had been something of the impatient colt in his appearance. He had a square head and gray eyes set very squarely in it; high cheek-bones, black hair, and the bleached white hands of his craft. Those hands lay on the gallery railing now.

"Wish I could go and smoke somewhere," said Clair.

"So do I."

"A little ambiguous."

He stared rudely.

Clair said suddenly, "Goodness!"

Startled, they both raised their heads. The metal stays below their feet had swung upward and downward, with a soggy swish of imprisoned lubricant. The whole airship had shuddered and for a moment had seemed to pause, so to speak, in its stride. Sinclair leaned over the gallery railing.

"Hell, look at the sea."

Clair looked. The Atlantic was boiling. Innumerable maelstroms were rising from the depths, turning even in that distance below them from bluegreen to white, creamed white, and then, in widening ripples, to dark chocolate. . . . Clair felt a kindly prick of interest in the performance.

"What's causing it?"

The American as silent for a moment, regarding the Atlantic with a scowl of surprise. He said, "Impossible."

"What is?"

"I said impossible." He brushed past her toward the doorway of the lounge. Paused. "See the dark chocolate?"

Clair nodded, regarding him with a faint amusement.

"Well, don't you see it must have come from the bottom?"

"So it must." She peered down again. "And it's deep here, isn't it?"

"Perhaps a couple of miles." He disappeared.

News of the submarine earthquake spread quickly enough. Passengers crowded the galleries, Miss Kemp coming to the side of Clair in some excitement. Another passenger, the inescapable portrait-hound, appeared with a camera of unbelievable price and intricacy, and snapshot the Atlantic closely and severely. From the flashing of lens in the gallery of the engine-house it was obvious that a member of the crew was similarly engaged.

"The chocolate's dying away," said Clair Stranlay.

So it was. The Atlantic had resumed its natural hue. The maelstroms had vanished, or the airship had passed beyond the locality where they still uprose. For, after that first shudder, the *Magellan's Cloud* had held on her way unfalteringly. The snapshotter beside Clair wrinkled a puzzled brow.

"Very strange. I could have sworn there was a ship down there to the south only a minute or so ago. It's disappeared. . . . Quick going."

The airship beat forward into the waiting evening. Sky and sea were as before. But presently there gathered in the west such polychrome splendor of sunset as

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the *Magellan's* commander, who had crossed the Atlantic many times by ship, had never before observed.

And suddenly, inexplicably, it grew amazingly cold.

THE airship's wireless operator fumed over dials and board, abandoned the instrument, went out into the miniature crow's nest that overhung his cabin, glanced about him and beat his hands together in the waft of icy air that chilled them.

"Damn funny," he commented.

He went back to his cabin and rang up the *Magellan's* commander. The latter had donned the only overcoat he had brought on board and was discussing the weather with the navigator when the wireless operator's voice spoke in his ear.

"Is that you, sir?"

"Yes."

"I'm sorry, but it seems impossible to send that message."

"Eh?"

"I thought there was some fault in the set. I've been sitting here for the last two and a half hours trying to tap in on France or a ship. There's no message come through. I've sent out yours, but there's been no reply."

The commander was puzzled. "That's strange, Gray. Sure your instrument is functioning all right?"

"Certain, sir. I've broadcast to the receiving apparatus in the passengers' lounge and they heard perfectly."

"Damn funny. Get it right as soon as you can, will you?"

"But . . . right, sir."

The commander put down the telephone and turned to give the news to the navigator. They were in the steering cage and it was just after eight o'clock. But the navigator, instead of standing by with his usual stolid expressionlessness, was at the far end of the cage, staring upward fascinatedly.

"Gray says the infernal wireless has gone out of order. Bright lookout if we go into fog over the banks. . . . Hello, anything wrong?"

"Come here, Commodore."

The commander crossed to the navigator's side. The latter pointed up to a darkling sky which, ever since the sudden fall of temperature, had been adrift with a multitude of cloudlets like the débris of a feather-bed. The commander peered upward ineffectually.

"Well, what is it?"

"Look. Up there."

"Only the moon. Well?"

"Well, it's only the twenty-second of the month. The new moon, in its first quarter, isn't due till the twenty-seventh. And that one's gibbous."

"Good Christopher!"

They both stared at the sky through the lattice of airship wire, amazed, half-convinced that some trick was being played upon them. From behind the clouds the moon was indeed emerging, round and wind-flushed and full. It sailed the sky serenely, five days ahead of time, taking stock of this other occupant of its firmament. The *Magellan's* commander brought his glasses to bear on it. It appeared to be the same moon.

"But it's impossible. The calendar must be wrong."

"The only thing possibly wrong is the date. And it's not—as of course we know. Look, here's to-day's *Matin*."

He showed it. It was dated the twenty-second of August, 1932.

The airship *Magellan's Cloud* beat forward into the growing radiance of moonlight which had mysteriously obliterated the last traces of the day.

LOOKING out from his cabin window as he prepared to undress and go to bed, the American, Keith Sinclair, was startled. He was aware that it had grown intensely cold, as indeed was every soul on board the *Magellan's Cloud*, whether on duty or in bed. But now his gaze revealed to him the fact that the airship's hull was silvered with frost in the moonlight. Frost at this altitude in August?

For a moment he accepted the moonlight. And then standing in the soft *hush-hush* of the flexible airship walls, realization of the impossibility of that moon came on him, as it had done on the navigator.

"Now how the devil did you come to be there?"

The moon, sailing a sky that was now quite clear, cloudless and starless, made no answer. The notorious deportee whistled a little, remembering a Basque story heard from his mother—of how the sun one morning had risen in the semblance of the moon. . . . But that didn't help. It wasn't nearly morning yet. And it was an indubitable moon.

Still whistling, he felt his pulse and, as an afterthought, took his temperature. Both were normal. Meanwhile, the cold

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increased. Sinclair pulled open his cabin door.

"Look up the navigator again. He had precious little explanation of that submarine earthquake, but the moon's beyond ignoring."

But, crossing the lounge, glimpse of the dark seascape beyond the open door drew him out on the passengers' gallery. There it was even colder, though there was no gale. The ship was traveling at a low altitude. Below, smooth, vast and unhurrying, the rollers of the Atlantic passed out of the near sheen of moonlight into the dimness astern. . . . Abruptly Sinclair became aware that the gallery had another occupant.

Clair Stranlay: in pajamas, slippers and wrap. Intent on the night and the sea. But, imagining for a moment that she had air-sickness, the American groped along the hand-rail toward her.

"Feel ill?"

She started. "What? Doctor Sinclair, isn't it? I'm quite well."

"You'll be down with pneumonia if you stay here."

She thought: "You must be a blood relation of the Irish policeman—'you'll have to be moving on if you're going to be standing here.' But I'd better not say so. Thrush Road impertinence Miss Kemp would diagnose it." Aloud:

"Don't think so. I do winter bathing and icy baths. What's happened?"

"The cold?"

"Yes."

"Early bergs down from the north, I suppose."

"But it's not nearly the season yet."

He had seen something in the moonlight below them. He caught her arm. Clair brushed the short, red-tipped curls from her face with one hand, clung to the hand-rail with the other and looked down.

Out of the deserted Atlantic was emerging what appeared to be an immense berg —a sailing of cragged, shapeless grayness upon the water. The moonlight struck wavering bands of radiance from it, and for a moment, in some trick of refraction, it glowed a pearled blue as though lighted from within. It passed underfoot, and as it passed a beam of light shot down from the navigating cabin, played upon it, passed, returned, hesitated, hovered, was abruptly extinguished.

But not so quickly that the two occupants of the passengers' gallery failed to see an accretion such as no iceberg ever bore. For beyond the berg had showed up a long, sandy beach, and beyond that the vague suggestion, a mere limning in the moon-dusk, of a flat and comber-washed island.

Sinclair swore, unimpassioned. "I'm going to find out about this. Are we making for the Pole?"

Clair, something to her own amusement, found herself shaking with excitement. "But what could it have been? There are no islands on the France-New York track."

"We've just seen one. I'm going to find out what the navigating cabin knows about it. Unless we're Pole-bound—and that's nonsense—the submarine earthquake may have thrown it up."

"It must have done other things as well, then." Clair began to stamp her feet to warmth. The rest of her felt only the glow of well-being that falling temperatures nowadays gifted her unfailingly as guerdon for much braving of wintry dips. "Haven't you noticed something entirely missing from the sea—even though this is the crowded season?"

"What?" He sounded impatient.

"Ship-lights. Not one has shown up since sunset."

"Who said so?"

"One of the riggers I spoke to just now."

She saw, dimly, his puzzled scowl, and thought, with the unfailing Cockney imp for prompter, "Disapproving of the Atlantic again!" He said:

"The submarine quake we saw couldn't have affected shipping. It was quite localized. If it had caused great damage the wireless bulletins they post in the lounge would have told us."

"Don't they?"

The same thought occurred to them simultaneously. Clinging to the hand-rail, she followed Sinclair into the cabin. The case with wireless transcriptions was hung against the farther wall. They crossed to it, looked at it and then looked at each other. Clair's face close to his, a flushed and lovely and easily controlled face, he found for a moment irritatingly disconcerting.

No notices had been posted since five.

"Look here, Miss—"

"Stranlay."

"Miss Stranlay, I'm going to find out about things. Something extraordinary seems to have happened. But if any of the other passengers come out, don't alarm them."

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Clair shook her head, regarding him with upraised brows.

"Much too. . . ."

"Eh?"

". . . dictatorial. . . . And I alarm people only in my books."

"Oh! Do you write?"

"Novels."

"Oh! I'd go to bed if I were you. I'll tap on your cabin door and let you know what I hear."

Fortunate she hadn't seen anything peculiar in the moonlight itself. . . .

Passing through the hull, he stopped at a window and himself noted another happening.

The moonlight was pouring lengthwise into the long hull of *Magellan's Cloud*, not striking due in front, as a moment before.

The airship had turned southward.

CLAIR STRANLAY arrived in her cabin, and, looking out at the far moon-misted horizon of the Atlantic, she thought:

"He'd never heard of me! Publicity, where are thy charms? . . . Any more than I of him. But how desperately important folk we are to ourselves!" She yawned. "Must insert that reflection in my next serial. It can't have been used in more than a million novels before this."

And, because that Cockney insouciance of Battersea days seldom deserted her, and she had long ceased to feel mildly vexed that there lived a world which devoured not best-sellers, she forgot the matter. She slipped out of her wrap and admired her pajamaed and comely self in the mirror.

A spear-beam of white moonlight splashed on her shoulder and she raised her head, with the red lights in her hair, and looked at it. She put up her hand.

"The blessed thing feels almost cold."

Something quite extraordinary had happened to the *Magellan's Cloud*. But what? Delay it much reaching New York?

"Oh, my good God!" sighed Clair, getting into bed.

For, escaping England and boredom to go and lecture in America, the awfulness of the ennui, hitherto concealed, that lay awaiting her appalled her. The shore. Miles and miles of ferroconcrete, macadam, pelting rush and automobilist slither. Packing of clothes—scanty though they were. Mooring mast. Elevator. Customs shed. Forms. Beefy officials. Forms. Literary gatherings. And rows and rows of eyes set in faces more like those of paralytic codfish than human beings—faces of women combed and powdered and bathed to excess, living hungrily on the mean grubbing and sweating of mean and shriveled hes. Shes! Oh, my good God, the shes of the world!

And, thinking of them, Clair's mind-mask of insouciance, brittle and bright, quivered and almost showered her soul with its flakes. Sometimes, indeed, it cracked and fell about her entirely, and she'd hear that boy on the wire outside Mametz, and her desperate distaste for her work, her life and her century crescendoed in her heart into the cry of a prisoned, tortured thing. . . .

"Oh, forget it. The mess of our lives! Civilization! Ragged automatons or lopsided slitherers."

But here Clair Stranlay found the blessedness of sleep now close upon her. Her body had lost its surface cold. She curled up her toes a little under the quilt—they were even, uncramped and shapely toes—and sighed a little, and wished she could smoke a cigarette, and fell fast asleep—and was shot out of sleep five minutes later by a knock at the door of her cabin.

"YES, come in," she called, good-tempered even then: good temper had dogged her through life. Was it morning already and had they sighted New York?

But there was no daylight, only moonlight, entering the cabin window. She reached up to the switch and in the pallor of electric light looked at the American. Keith Sinclair, shutting the door, thought, "Pretty thing."

"About what's happened, Miss Stranlay— Can I sit down?"

"Why, yes," said Clair, blinking her eyes and looking round the small cabin. "There's a chair."

The American sat down. His high-cheeked-boned face was dourly thoughtful. "We're in this together in a fashion, I suppose, seeing we were the first to see the submarine quake. Well—the commander refused to talk sense. Scared I will alarm the others, I suppose. But he has to admit that no wireless messages have been received since the time of the submarine disturbance, though the apparatus of the *Magellan* appears to be perfectly in order. Also, he's turned the airship south."

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"South?" Clair's hands dropped from her neck at that. "Then we're not making New York?"

"We're not," grimly. "We'll be lucky if we fetch up in Brazil at this rate."

"Thank God," said Clair.

"Eh?"

"Nothing. Not particularly anxious to reach New York. The codfish can wait. . . . Sorry, I'm still half asleep. Nice of you to come and tell me the news. Why has the *Magellan* turned south, then, and what does the captain say about that island with the berg we saw from the gallery?"

"Turned south because he's scared about the effect of the continued cold on the airship's envelope. I don't wonder, either. I met your garrulous rigger just now and he says we're carrying tons of ice. As for the island—the navigator says we're mistaken."

"Astigmatism or too much liquor?"

He grinned—a softening relaxation. ("Possibility that some day he'll laugh," recorded Clair's imp.) He said, "Neither in his case and both in ours, he seems to think. Truth of the matter is that the crew is as puzzled as we are, but they think if the passengers knew they'd blame them for all these extraordinary phenomena." He considered his pajama-jacketed listener for a moment. "There's another thing, Miss Stranlay, which you didn't notice. The most serious of the lot, though the commander refuses to have anything said about it. It's the moon."

"What has it done?"

"Arrived five days ahead of time. There shouldn't be a full moon for another fortnight; there shouldn't be a moon at all just now."

"But—that *is* the moon."

He looked through the cabin window at it. "It is." He rubbed his chin impatiently. "And it isn't. . . . Eh?"

"I said, Clear as mud."

"Oh! It's a thing not easy to explain." He stood up. "But I've a telescope with me—probably the most powerful magnifier on the *Magellan*—and I've had a peek at the moon through it. Just a minute."

He was back in less. He opened the cabin window and poised the telescope on the ledge. Clair sat forward and looked through it.

MAIN
This Thin Gillette sure has the stuff—
Talks turkey to beards plenty tough—
Lasts long, shaves fast, saves dough as well—
And that's why wise men say it's swell!
Top quality at rock-bottom price
THIN
Gillette
BLADES
Gillette
4 for 10c
Produced By The Maker Of The Famous Gillette Blue Blade

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"Keep both eyes open," advised the American.

So she did, and for a moment was blinded in consequence. The moon was sinking. Stars were appearing pallidly. Clair gazed across space. Then:

"Nothing very different, is it? I've looked at it through the big glass at Mount Wilson. Why—the nose!"

The Man in the Moon lacked a nose. Clair turned her face to Sinclair's moon-illumined one. He nodded.

"Exactly. That mountain range on the moon is missing. Something is happening up there."

She thought for a moment, caught a glimpse of a possible explanation. "Then—the tides are caused by the moon. Mayn't the submarine earthquake have been caused by the change in the moon?"

"Perhaps. I'm not an astronomer. But something abnormal has happened to the moon—both to her surface and her rate or revolution. The submarine earthquake we witnessed may have been the result. Probably it's had other effects in the far north—God knows what. Bringing down bergs and so forth."

"And the wireless interruptions due to the same cause?" Clair Stranlay lowered the telescope from her cabin-window in the *Magellan*. "Most interesting thing I've seen for years. Pity we've explained it all so nicely."

But, as they were later to learn, they were very far indeed from having explained it.

AND presently, while Clair slept again and Sinclair tried to sleep and the commander sat peering at an almanac, and the navigator peered into the west—a pale shimmer of daylight arose in the east, lighting the surface of that strange Atlantic, flowing liquid almost as the Atlantic itself till it touched the southward-hasting, high-slung cars of the *Magellan's Cloud*. A moment it lingered (as if puzzled) on that floating monster of the wastes, and then, abruptly, like a candle lighted for a hasty glimpse of the world by some uncertain archangel, was snuffed out. . . . And the navigator from his gallery was shouting urgent directions into the engine-room telephone.

It is doubtful if they ever reached the engineers. For at that moment the nose of the *Magellan*, driving south at the rate of eighty miles an hour, rustled and crumpled up with a thin crack of metallic sheathing. The whole airship sang in every strut and girder, and, quivering like a stunned bird, still hung poised against the mountain range that had arisen out of the darkness.

The drumming roar roused to frantic life everyone on board, asleep or awake. Most of the passengers probably succeeded in leaving their beds, if not their cabins. On the lurching floors of these they may have glanced upward and caught horrified glimpses of the next moment's happening.

The airship's hull spurted into bright flames, green-glowing, long-streaming in the darkness that had succeeded the false twilight. Then the whole structure broke apart, yet held together by the tendrils of the galleries and cabins, and, like an agonized, mutilated thing, drew back from the mountainside and fell and flamed and fell again, unendingly, in two long circles, the while the morning came again, hasting across the sea, and the noise of that sea rose up and up, and reached the ears of some on the *Magellan*. . . .

And then suddenly the Atlantic yawned and hissed, while the dawn passed overhead and lighted the mountains and hastened into the west.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SURVIVORS

NOW, what happened to Clair Stranlay in that dawn-wrecking of the *Magellan's Cloud* was this:

The preliminary shock, when the nose of the airship drove into the mountain which had mysteriously arisen out of the spaces of the Atlantic, did not awaken her, though she twitched in dreams, and indeed, may in dream have had a momentary startlement. She stirred uneasily, though still asleep, freeing her pretty arms from the quilt during the period that the *Magellan* hung, death-quivering, against her murderer. Then, abruptly, sight, hearing and a variety of other sensations were vouchsafed to her fortissimo, crescendo.

She heard the first explosion which shattered the hull of the airship, and leaped up in bed to see through the cabin window, phantasmagoric against a gray morning sky, the flare and belch of the flames. She sat stunned, uncomprehending, the while the floor of her cabin tilted and tilted and the metal-work creaked and warped. Then the cabin door, a

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groaning, flare-illumined panel, was torn open, a figure shot in, crossed to Clair's bed and caught her with rough hands. It was the American, Sinclair.

She heard him shout:

"Come on, hurry up! The ship's a flaming wreck. . . . Clothes — some clothes!"

He swept a pile into his arms from the locker. Clair jumped from bed, plucked something—she could not see what it was—from the floor, and groped across the cabin after Sinclair. He tugged at the door. It had jammed.

Now, out of the corridor, above the babel of sounds, one sound sharp-edged and clear came to them: a moan like that of trapped cattle. For a moment it rang in Clair's ears in all its horror, and then —the floor of the cabin vanished from beneath the feet of Sinclair and herself.

Below, the Atlantic.

And Clair thought, "Oh God," and fell and fell, with a flaming comet in wavering pursuit. Till something that seemed like a red-hot dagger was thrust to the hilt into her body.

BREAKERS, and breakers again—the cry of them and the plash of them, and their salt taste stale in her mouth. In and in, and out with a slobbering surge. Water in pounding hill-slopes, green and white-crested. Pounding tons of water whelming over into those breakers. . . . Clair Stranlay cried out and awoke.

"Better? I thought you'd gone. . . . My God, look at the *Magellan!*"

Her body seemed wrapped in a sheet of fire that was a sheet of ice. She could not open her eyes. She tried again. They seemed fast-gummed. Then, abruptly, they opened. She moaned at the prick of the salt-grime.

She and Keith Sinclair were lying in a wide sweep of mountain-surrounded bay, on a beach of pebbles. Beyond and below them the sea was thundering. And out in the bay, a splendor like a fallen star, the *Magellan's Cloud* was flaming against a dark-gray, rainy sky momentarily growing lighter, as if the *Magellan* were serving as tinder to its conflagration.

This was not what Clair saw immediately. It was what she realized as she looked around her. Sinclair lay at right angles to her, propped on his arm.

Clair stared at him, sought for her voice, found it after an interval, manipulated it with stiff and very painful lips.

"How did we get here?"

"Swam." The American swayed to his knees. His high-cheek-boned face looked as though the blood had been drained from it through a pipette. "We hit the water before the *Magellan* did, and sank together. Came up clear of the wreck and I pulled you ashore. . . . Oh, damn!"

He felt very sick indeed. There was an inshore-blowing wind, bitterly cold. With a shock Clair discovered she was dressed in her pajamas only. Through those garments the rain-laden wind drove piercingly. It was laden now with other things than rain—adrift with red-glowing fragments of fluff, portions of the *Magellan's* fabric. The *Magellan?*

In that moment the airship blew up. A second Clair saw its great girders, like the skeleton of a great cow, then they vanished.

The eastward sky was blinded to darkness in the flash, Clair and Sinclair momentarily stunned with the noise of the explosion. Then a great wave poured shoreward out of the stirred water of the bay, leaped up the beach, snarled, spat, soaked and splashed them anew, tore at them, retreated. Gasping, Clair saw Sinclair's hand extended toward her. She caught it.

Unspeaking, now crawling, now gaining their feet and proceeding at a shambling run, they attained the upper beach. Fifty yards away, across the shingle, there towered in the dimness of the morning great cliffs of black basalt. Against their black wall Sinclair thought he discerned a fault and overhang. He pointed toward it and they stumbled together across sharp stones that lacerated their feet. Anything to get out of the wind and spray. Clair almost fell inside the crack in the rock-face. Sinclair crumpled to the ground beside her. Clair heard some one sobbing and realized it was herself.

"What's wrong?"

She looked up at him, her teeth chattering, thinking, "I suppose we'll both be dead in a minute." She said, "I'm all right."

Prone, he began to laugh crackedly at that. Clair stuffed her fingers in her ears and looked out to sea.

It was deserted. The *Magellan's Cloud* had disappeared without leaving other trace than themselves. Green, tremendous, with tresses upraised and flying

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through the malachite comb of the wind, the Atlantic surged over the spot where the wreck had flamed. An urgent fear came upon Clair. She shook the American's shoulder.

"Where are the others?"

"Dead."

He had stopped laughing. He lay face downward, unmoving. Clair shook him again.

"You mustn't! You must keep awake and. . . ."

But she knew it was useless. Her own head nodded in exhaustion. She laid her face in the curve of her arm and presently was as silent as he was.

THE morning wind died away and with its passing the sky began to clear. One after another, like great trailing curtains drawn aside from an auditorium, sheets of rain passed over the sea. But they passed northeastward, not touching the little bay. Lying exhausted and asleep in their inadequate shelter under the lee of the cliffs the two survivors of the airship's wreck stirred at the coming of the sunlight. Sinclair awoke, sat up, looked around, remembered. He whistled with cracked lips.

"Great Spartacus!"

Wrecked. The *Magellan's Cloud* blown up. And cold—the infernal cold. . . .

He was in pajamas—green-striped silk poplin. The suit clung to his skin in damp and shuddersome patches. He stood up. His feet were cut and bruised, black with congealed blood. The salt bit into them as he moved. Alternate waves of warmth and coldness flowed up and down his body.

Setting his teeth against giving way to the pull of the urgent pain in his feet, he began to knead and pound his throat and chest and abdomen and thighs, then took to massaging them, plucking out and releasing muscles like a violin-maker testing the strings of a bow. Suddenly something screamed at him, menacingly.

He glanced up, startled. It was a solitary gull. He thought, "And a peculiar one, too." It swooped and hovered, its bright eyes on the occupants of the shelter. Man and bird looked at each other unfriendlily. Then the gull, with a slow beating of wings, flapped out of sight. Sinclair resumed operations on his now tingling body.

Behind him, Clair Stranlay began to moan.

He had thought her dead. He wheeled round. Lying with her face and throat in the sun, she was moaning, again unable to open her eyes. Her hair was a damp mop.

Her eyes opened at last.

She sat up, remembering at once.

"Any of the others turned up?"

He shook his head.

"The sunlight woke me," he told her.

"I'm horribly thirsty."

"So am I. I'll go and look for water in a minute."

"Where do you think we are?"

"Somewhere in the Bay of Biscay. Coast of Portugal, perhaps."

Clair's undrowned imp raised a damp head. "Hope it's the sherry district. People inland must have seen the wreck of the *Magellan*. They're bound to come down to the shore, aren't they?"

"Bound to, I should think. Feel certain enough to rise now?"

She stood up with his arm supporting her. Instantly, in the full sunlight, she began to shiver. He nodded.

"Warm up with exercises. Know how? Right. I'll go and look for water and see if any people are coming down the cliffs. Don't overdo things. Shout for me if you feel faintness coming on."

He went, limping blood-heeled. Clair stared after him till his black poll vanished round a projection of rock, and then emerged slowly from her dejected sleeping-suit. She thought hazily, "Exercises! . . . Honest-to-God American ones. This can't be happening to me."

Her feet, like Sinclair's, she discovered bloody, though not so badly cut. Except its craving for water, her body in the next few strenuous minutes acquired comfort and familiarity again. The pajamas steamed in the sunlight; ceased to steam. In ten minutes they were dry.

"There's water round to the left—a cascade over the rocks. Can you walk?"

She essayed the adventure gingerly. "Easily."

Out in the full sunlight she stopped to look round the bay. Desolate. The navigator, the commander, Miss Kemp—a fit of shuddering came on again. She covered her face with her hands.

But the horror lingered for a moment only, and then was gone. She turned to the American, a pace behind her, waiting for her, a grotesque figure in his shrunken pajamas, his blue-black hair untidily matted. He stood arms akimbo, scowling at the sea. A gull—there seemed but one gull in the bay—swooped over

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their heads. Clair thought, after that one swift under-glance, "We must look like a bridal couple in a Coward play."

She became aware that the silence around them was illusory. It was a thing girdled by unending sound, as the earth is girdled with ether. The tide was no longer in full flow, but the serene thunder of the breakers was unceasing. Clair's voice sounded queer to herself as she spoke, as though voices were scarce and alien things in this land.

The pebbles underfoot were slimily warm. From the sea a breath of fog was rising, like thin cigarette smoke. Not a ship or a boat was in sight, nothing upon or above the spaces of the Atlantic but a solitary cirrus low down in the northeastern sky. Clair's heels smarted. The American limped.

They turned a corner in the winding wall of cliff and were in sight of the waterfall. In distance it seemed to hang bright, lucent, unmoving, a silver pillar in a dark pagan temple. Clair loved it for this beauty; she had the power in any circumstances to love beauty unexpected and unwarranted. She bent and scooped from it a double handful of water. She gasped.

It was icily cold. Some drops slapshed through her jacket. They stung like leaden pellets. She shivered and, squatting, rinsed her mouth and laved her face. Sinclair looked down at her; knelt down beside her. They scoured their faces in solemn unison. Standing up, Sinclair looked round about him, involuntarily, for a towel. Clair wiped her face with the sleeve of her pajamas. Sinclair followed suit. Wiping, he suddenly stayed operations.

"Here's some one at last."

He pointed toward the leftward tip of the bay. A black-clad figure was descending the inky, sun-laced escarpment, apparently less steep at that spot than elsewhere. It was descending in haste. It had descended. It stood hesitant, glancing upward, not toward them. Clair put her fingers to her mouth and startled the bay, Sinclair and the stranger with a piercing, moaning whistle which the rocks caught and echoed and reechoed.

"Stop that!" said Sinclair angrily.

He was to see often enough in succeeding days that look of innocent, amused surprise on the lovely face turned toward him. The black-garmented figure had started violently, seen them, stood doubtful a moment, but now, with gesticulating arm, was coming toward them.

"I can't speak a word of Portuguese," said Clair. "Can you?"

There was a pause. Then: "It won't be necessary. I don't suppose he knows Portuguese himself."

"No?" Puzzled, Clair examined the nearing stranger. He was finding the going punishing. He stumbled. His features changed from a blur to discernible outlines. "Who is he?"

"A fellow-passenger on the *Magellan*. Sir John Mullaghan."

"I WAS washed ashore at the far peak of the bay when the *Magellan's Cloud* struck the water. I imagined I was the only survivor."

The gray-haired man with the gentle sensitive face was addressing Clair. She held out her hand to him.

"I'm Clair Stranlay. Doctor Sinclair rescued me." She glanced from one to the other, thinking, "Don't bite."

"You know each other?" she asked.

The American smiled thinly, but otherwise took no notice of the question. Sir John Mullaghan began to unbutton his coat. Clair said, wide-eyed, "What's wrong?"

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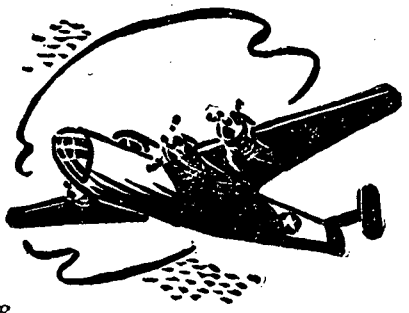

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"You must wear my coat, Miss Stranlay."

"No, thanks. I'm quite comfy. How ever do you come to be wearing your clothes?"

"I found it too cold to go to bed, and was sitting up studying some documents when the wreck occurred." His small neat form was clad in the shrunken caricature of a dress suit. Collar and tie were missing; the breast of the shirt was very limp and muddied. Sinclair glanced sidewise at his feet and scowled again. Shod in thin pumps that were at least some slight protection. . . .

Clair said, "Let's sit down. What did you see at the top of the cliff?"

They sat down, Clair and Sir John. Sinclair remained standing. Clair folded one shapely knee over the other, and twisted a little on the boulder, thinking, "Oh, my good God, how I would like some coffee and a soft chair to sit in!" She repeated her question to the new arrival and added:

"And what made you come down so quickly?"

The armaments manufacturer was sitting with his gray head in his hands. He looked up.

"A lion, Miss Stranlay."

"A—what?"

"A lion. One of the largest brutes I have ever seen. It stalked me close to the cliff-head."

Clair glanced at Sinclair, glanced back at Sir John, looked up at the cliffs. The Atlantic said, "Shoom. Surf. Shoom." The cirrus cloud trailed its laces across the face of the sun, and for a little the faces of the three derelicts on the beach were in patterned shadow. "A *lion?* But I thought we were in Portugal?"

"I don't know where we are. But this is not the coast of Portugal. At the top of the cliff there is a further terrace-wall to be climbed. It is fringed with bushes and trees. I expected to get some view of the country there and went up about half an hour ago."

"What happened?"

"I pushed through the fringe of bushes until I came to a fairly open space. I was certain that I would see some village near at hand, or at least houses and some marks of cultivation." He paused. The Atlantic listened. "There are no houses and the country is quite wild. It is natural open park-land, dotted with clumps of trees, stretching as far away as one can see. And on the horizon, about five or six miles distant from here, are two volcanoes."

"Volcanoes?" The American was startled into speech. "You must have been mistaken."

"I have quite good eyesight, Miss Stranlay."

The American bit his lip. Clair said, "Where do you think we are, then?"

"Somewhere on the coast of Africa."

"But it's much too cold. And I never heard of volcanoes on the coast of Africa."

"There are no volcanoes on the coast of Africa. Most likely the lion was some beast escaped from a menagerie."

This was Sinclair. Sir John Mullaghan flushed. Clair, wondering bemusedly if there was ever an armaments manufacturer who looked less the part, wondered also if the beast of which he spoke had had any existence outside the reaches of a disaster-strained imagination. She looked again at the cliff-top, shining in the cool sunlight. "We'll have to go up there and look for food, anyhow. I'm horribly hungry."

All three of them were. It was nearing noon. They licked hungry lips. Both men, if for different reasons, had been too preoccupied to realize the emptiness within them. Sinclair, peering up at the cliffs in the breaker-hung silence, thought, "Hungry? As hell. But if this patriot warrior didn't dream, there's a lion up there. Still—without food we'll never last another night."

Clair thought, "Now if this were a good novel of wrecked mariners we'd toss up for it to see which was to eat t'other." And she began to giggle, being very hungry and somewhat dizzy.

"Miss Stranlay!"

She regarded the American placidly. "It's all right. I was thinking of a funny story."

"Oh!"

"Yes." She stood up, suddenly decided. "Wrecked people sometimes eat each other if they can't get other food—at least, they always do in my profession. *De rigueur*. Let's climb the cliff and see if the lion's gone."

"Come on, then," said Sinclair shortly, striding over the shingle. They followed him, Sir John Mullaghan dubiously, Clair satisfiedly, and once surrepitiously trying to rub some feeling into her oddly-numbed stomach. Sinclair was making for the point ascended and descended by the armaments manufacturer. His survey

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of the cliffs had told him that no other spot was climbable.

They went on along the deserted beach. The tide was going out. Sinclair glanced back casually, halted in his stride, stared, abandoned the other two, strode past them.

"Wait."

THEY looked after him. Ten yards away he bent over something at the wet verge of shingle. He picked it up. It glittered, wetly. He shook it vigorously. Clair called, "What is it?"

"An eider-down quilt."

So it was. Brought nearer in Sinclair's arms, Clair recognized it.

"It's off my cabin-bed in the *Magellan!* I'd know those whorls anywhere. . . . That was the thing I must have picked up when you came to get me."

"Lucky that you did."

"Why?" She regarded it without enthusiasm. "It's very wet, isn't it?"

"It'll dry. And the nights are likely to be cold."

"But—" Clair looked out to sea, looked round the deserted bay again. The possibility that this was not, after all, a few [illegible] lark struck her. "We'll be rescued then."

[illegible]er of the men spoke. Sir John [illegible] gray hand over his gray hair. [illegible] comment was the usual im[illegible]own. . . . They resumed their [illegible]iffward, the barefoot refugees [illegible] the moist pebbles, Sir John [illegible] better case. The thin sun[illegible]wind bit casually through pa[illegible]-fabric. At the foot of the cliff[illegible]cent, hearing a swish of wings, Clair looked back.

The bay's solitary sea-gull was following them. Clair held out her hand to it. At that, as if frightened by the gesture, it turned in the air in a wide loop, and planed away steeply down toward the retreating tide. The American was speaking to Sir John.

"You've no shoes. Will you lead?"

The armaments manufacturer hesitated only a moment, nodded curtly and began the ascent. The silence but for his scrapings over the rock was more intense than ever.

Sinclair and Clair followed, the American in a short time beginning to swear violently under his breath because of his cut feet. Clair said, "Say something for me as well."

He glanced at her—almost a puzzled glance—from below his fair unhappy brows. Then he went on. Clair, panting, poised to rest. She was more than a little frightened, though she refused to think of the fact. . . . Where were they? And what on earth was going to happen? And how long would her pajamas last?

Sinclair's toiling back, quilt-laden, reproached her sloth. Sir John Mullaghan had almost disappeared.

From the shore the circling gull saw the three strange animals—it had never seen such animals, nor had any gull on the shore of that strange Atlantic ever seen their like—dwindle to spider-splayed shadows against the face of the cliffs, dwindle yet further to hesitant, foreshortened dots on the cliff-brow, and then vanish for ever from its ken.

CHAPTER THREE

"I'M AN UNKNOWN LAND"

THREE days later, and the coming of nightfall. Almost it came in countable strides. All the afternoon the line of volcanoes beyond the leftward swamps had smoked like hazy beacons, like the whinburnings on a summer day in Scotland.

They had drowsed in the clear sharp sunshine that picked out so pitilessly the hilly, wooded contours of the deserted land. Swamp and plain and rolling grassland, straggling rightward forest fringe, a swamp and plain and hill again. Unendingly. But with the westerning of the sun these things had softened in outline, blurred in distance, and now, on the hesitating edge of darkness, the great chain of volcanoes lighted and lighted till they were a beckoning candelabrum, casting long shadows and gleams of light over leagues of the bleak savanna.

The coming nightfall hesitated a little on the stilled treetops of the great western forest, and then, with uncertain feet, walked westward, delicately, like Agag, to meet the challenge of those night-beacons kindled far down in the earth's interior. So walking, it paused a little, as if astounded, by a spot in the tree-sprayed foothills that led to the volcanoes' range.

For here, in all that chilled and hushed and waiting expectancy, were three things that did not wait, that bore human heads and bodies and cast them anxious glances at the astounded and brooding nightfall. For three sunsets now the nightfall had come on those three has-

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tening figures. Each time they were farther south, each time they greeted the astounded diurnal traveler with the uplift of thin ridiculous pipings in that waste land overshadowed by the volcanoes. They did so, now.

" 'Fraid it'll beat us," said the middle figure, a short bunched shapelessness.

The leading figure, tall and hastening, grunted. The last figure, breathing heavily, said: "I also think it's useless. We had much better try the forest."

"What do you think, Doctor Sinclair?" asked the midway shapelessness.

The leader grunted again.

"Damn nonsense. We'll climb toward the volcanoes, where we've a chance of getting warm. Another night in the open may finish us. And the forest's not safe."

Underfoot, the heavy-fibered grass rustled harsh and wet to the touch of naked feet. Overhead, the dark traveler still hesitated. The heavy-breathing rearward figure said:

"There is probably no danger in the forest. You saw things while you were half-awake. In daylight we've seen no animal larger than a small deer."

The leading figure swore, turned a shadowed face, halted and confronted the rear-guard, and disregarded a restraining motion made by the shapelessness. "Damn you and your impertinences. Did you imagine that lion you originally saw, then? I tell you I saw a brute twice as big as any lion hovering round the tree-clumps we slept in this morning. And you make me out a liar, you—you damned straying patriot freak!"

And the middle shapelessness which, under the endrapement of the eiderdown quilt salvaged from the wreck of the *Magellan's Cloud,* contained Clair Stranlay, thought, "Goodness, they're both nearly all in. And I don't wonder. What on earth am I to do if they start scrapping now?"

That question had vexed her almost continually for some seventy hours. The American and Sir John Mullaghan had seemed to her designed from the beginning of the world to detest each other. For seventy hours they had adjusted fairly well, but she'd known antagonism would show. And now—

Clair thought, "Oh my good God, I could knock your silly heads together. And I'm cold and miserable and hungry. And if ever we get out of this awful country I'll write an account and lampoon you both—"

THERE would be plenty of copy for that account. . . . The wreck. The rescue. Sir John Mullaghan arriving on the scene, complete with tale of discourteous lion. Climbing the cliffs. No lion. Wide view of the sea. No ships. No food. And before them an unrecognizable landscape about which Sinclair and Sir John had at once begun to disagree. Labrador or North Canada, said Sinclair—abruptly deserting Portugal. There were supposed to be lost volcanoes in the wilds of Canada. Sir John had asked if there were also lions, and how the *Magellan,* turning south just prior to being wrecked, could have reached Canada? No reply to that. Scowls. All three growing hungry. Finally, exploration in search of food.

It had led them farther and farther inland, that exploration. No animals. Not a solitary bird. Strange land without the sound of birds, without the chirp of grasshoppers in those silent forest clumps! Clair had shivered at that voicelessness, though, far off beyond the cliffs, they could still hear the moan of the lost Atlantic.

They had strayed remoter and remoter from that moan, out into thinner aspects of the park-land, till the landscape [redacted] saw was this: Distant against the [redacted] horizon a long mountain sierra, [redacted] toothed with snow, cold and [redacted] gleaming in the cool sunshine, [redacted] points lighted with the lazy smoking volcanoes. To the right a jumble of hills that must lead back to the Atlantic eventually, and those hills matted and clogged with forest. But not jungle. Pines and conifers and firs.

"Likely-looking country for lion," the American remarked acidly, and then hushed them both with a sharp gesture. Something stirred in a clump of bushes only a yard or so away. They'd stared at it, making out at last the head and shoulders and attentive antlers of a small deer. Sinclair had acted admirably then, Clair had thought—albeit a little ridiculously.

He'd motioned them to silence, unwound the damp eider-down from about his shoulders, crept forward, suddenly leaped, landed on top of the deer and proceeded to smother the little animal in the quilt's gaudy folds. Squeals and scuffling. Deer on top, deer underfoot. Sinclair in all directions, but hanging on grimly and cursing so that Clair, running to his aid, had thought regretfully how she'd no note-book with her on this jaunt. . . .

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She halted and gasped.

For at her forward rush all the bushes round about, probably held paralyzed by fear until then, had suddenly vomited deer; a good two score of deer. A hoof-clicking like the rattle and an insane orchestra of castanets, the bushes were deserted, and the deer in headlong flight. Clair had stared after them, fascinated, been cursed for her pains, then had knelt down and, rather white-faced, assisted Sinclair to strangle his captive. . . .

Sir John Mullaghan, who had tripped and fallen in his forward rush, had arrived then.

They had kindled a fire and fed on that deer. The making of the fire had been a problem until it was discovered that the armaments manufacturer had a petrol-lighter in his pocket. Ornate, gold-mounted thing. No petrol. But the flint had still functioned and there had been lots of dry grass available. Fire in a minute. How to cook the deer? No knives.

Sinclair had said, "Miss Stranlay, go away for a minute. You, Mullaghan, I want your help." Clair had turned away, reluctantly, had heard an unfriendly confabulation, had heard the sound of scuffling, the blow that must have broken the animal's skull, smelled the reek of blood, had wheeled round with a cry. . . . The men had torn a leg and haunch from the body of the deer.

The meal had been good, though singey and tough. Sinclair had burned his fingers in tearing off a half-cooked portion and handing it to her. Sir John, his dress-suit spattered with drops of blood, had helped at the cooking efficiently enough. But there had been no cooperation between him and Sinclair. They had sat, replete, and disagreed with each other, never once addressing each other, but talking through the medium of Clair. It had then been late afternoon.

"It's obvious we must hold inland and southward," said Sinclair. "There's no sign of human beings or habitations hereabout. And if this, as I suspect, is northern Canada in a warm spell, it is only southward we are ever likely to meet with any one."

"I doubt if there's anything in that, Miss Stranlay." The gray head had been shaken at her; the gentle eyes held determination. "Probably you, like myself, wish to get back to civilization as soon as possible? Then, I think, it's obvious we ought to return to the cliff-head before sunset and light a fire there and wait through the night. Some ship is bound to see the signal, for there are plenty of ships on the African coast."

Clair had wiped her greasy slim fingers on the coarse grass, and thought about it, sitting cross-legged and massaging her sweetly pedicured toes. "I don't know. Canada? I don't think we can be there, Doctor Sinclair. It's too far away from the eastern Atlantic, as Sir John says. But this is not a bit like Africa."

She had glanced round the unhappy landscape.

"Not a bit like anything I ever heard of!" She had thought of adding.

She looked at the three-quarters of deer left to them, the while the two men looked at her, Sinclair with apparent indifference, Sir John with courteous attention. "On the other hand, there doesn't seem to be any food in this place. All those little deer ran away south. They may have been strays from the south. I think we ought to follow them. After all, we're bound to meet people some time."

The American had stood up, at that, handed Clair the quilt, seized the deer, butted it with his hands, and then slung it across the shoulder of his pajamas-jacket. "You've the casting vote. Come on, then."

And they had gone on. They'd camped that night a few miles inland, under the lee of a ragged and woebegone pine on the edge of the great, silent forest itself. They had made another fire with the aid of Sir John Mullaghan's lighter, and broiled more deer and eaten it, all three of them by then weary and footsore from the few miles they'd covered, but Clair in no worse plight than the others. Clair washed greasy hands in a brook.

WHEN she came back they had apparently settled down for the night. Sir John lay to the left of her entrance. He had taken off his pumps and wrapped his feet with grass. He had also removed his coat and draped it round his thin shoulders. He lay close enough to the fire. It had grown cold, though there was no wind. Neither was there a star in the sky.

Sinclair lay near the fire also, but more directly under the lee of the pine. He was swathed about by bundles of grass, and Clair had thought, appalled, "Oh, my good God, I'll have to do some hay-making." But that had proved unnecessary.

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Between the spaces occupied by the two men, and directly opposite the bole of the pine, the quilt had been outspread to dry and had dried. This, Clair understood, was her sleeping position. She had sunk into the eider-down gratefully.

"Good night, you two," she had called, muffling the soft folds around about her.

Sinclair had merely grunted.

Sir John had said, uncovering his face, "Good night, Miss Stranlay. Call me if you want anything."

"Tea in the morning, please."

He had laughed, with pleasant courtesy, and there had been silence.

Such silence! All her life she would remember it, though the second night had made it commonplace. The night was a woman, asleep. Sometimes you could hear her breathe. Terrible. And against the sky, unlighted though it was, you saw her hair rise floating now and then. The pine-foliage. . . .

Miles and miles of it, this cold, queer country. Where was it? What would happen to them?

Clair had stirred in the light of the fire, and turned on her left side, staring at the dead wood and hearing the soft hiss of burning cones. She lay half-in, half-out, the spraying circle of radiance. Beyond that: the darkness. Fantastic position to be in!

She had thought, "To-night? I should have been in N'York. Betsy would have been coddling me. Bed-time cocktail. Slippers and—oh, my good God, a clean pair of pajamas. Lighted bedroom. Bed. Blankets. Sheets. A soft bed . . ." She had drowsed then and wakened to find the fire dying down and her shoulder cold where the eider-down had slipped aside. Also, her hip-bone had been aching unbearably. She had turned over and lain on her back, thinking, "Is it really me?" Three or four yards to her right she had seen the outline of the sleeping form of Sir John Mullaghan. He was snoring. She had turned her eyes toward Sinclair's place.

No more than herself was he asleep—or sleeping only fitfully. His grass wrappings had fallen off, and she saw the gleam of the firelight on his shoulder where the pajamas-jacket had failed of its purpose.

Next day they held south again, with little conversation.

Sinclair had divided up the last leg and haunch for the evening meal. "We don't know when we'll get any other food." The others had assented, Clair silently regretful, for she found herself very hungry in those hours of marching through the clear cold sunshine. Suddenly she had thought, and said aloud with a rush of longing, "Oh, my good God, I do wish I had a cigarette!"

Sir John Mullaghan had come to her aid unexpectedly. "I have two," he had said, and had drawn a small silver case from his pocket the while Clair stared at him unbelievingly. Opened, the case disclosed two veritable Egyptians. Clair had reached for one, starvingly, lighted it from a twig, drawn the acrid sweet smoke down into grateful lungs. Sir John, similarly employed, had sat at the other side of the fire. Sinclair, looking tired, looked into the fire. She had suddenly disliked Mullaghan.

"Share with me, Doctor Sinclair?"

"No, thanks. I don't smoke."

"Now, isn't that a blessed relief?" Clair had said, but she had not said it aloud. Instead, she had leaned back on the long coarse grass and smoked slowly, carefully, lingeringly, finishing long after Sir John, and indeed, had she known it, finishing the last cigarette ever smoked in that unknown land.

Next morning—the third morning—they had eaten the last of the deer and tramped southward again, across country still unchanged and unchanging in promise. But this morning had greeted them with rain, so that they had been forced to shelter under a great fir, watching the sheets of water warping westward over the long llanos. It looked almost like gray English countryside, grossly exaggerated in every feature.

"I'm going to hunt around and see if there's any food to be had, Miss Stranlay," Sinclair said.

"I think I'll also look round, Miss Stranlay," Sir John put in immediately.

"There's a fire required," the American had flung over his shoulder curtly. "And Miss Stranlay's tired."

Sir John Mullaghan had searched around for dry grass and twigs, scarce enough commodities, but it was clear that the men were becoming irritable.

Clair wrapped in the quilt, had fallen asleep listening to the slow patter of the rain on the leaves overhead.

Sir John Mullaghan, in a considerably battered dress suit, squatted on bruised and dirty heels, doing futile things with his petrol lighter against a dour loom of treey, desolate landscape. Sinclair had

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gone hunting and had not yet returned.

They had no method of measuring time, with the sun's face draped in trailing rain-curtains, but it must have been at least another two hours before Sinclair did come back, coming from the direction of the forest, and walking wearily, a soaked and tattered figure.

"You'll catch pneumonia," Clair had called, and tried to stir the fire to warmth-giving. But both she and Sir John had looked at the doctor with sinking hearts. Clair had said, casually, "Any luck?"

Sinclair had opened his right hand. "These."

They were half a dozen half-ripened beechnuts, picked up below a high, solitary and unclimbable tree. Sinclair told, shortly, that he had wandered for miles without sighting any animal or bird or fruit-bearing tree. "And we'd best be getting on again."

"Why?" Clair had queried, eating her two nuts.

"Because you can't stay unsheltered on a night such as this promises to be. We'll try nearer the mountains for some ledge or rock-shelter."

So once again they had set out southward, with the rain presently clearing merely to display a sun hovering on the verge of setting.

AND now, in the last of the daylight, lost, desperate and foolish, they stood on the brink of a disastrous quarrel, Sinclair with every appearance of being about to assault the armaments manufacturer, Sir John with his gentle face ablaze. Clair looked from one to the other of them, wanly, but still with that gay irony that was her salvation, and, after a little calculation, did the thing that she thought would be best under the circumstances.

She burst into tears.

The two men paused. The American, she observed through her fingers, went more white and haggard than ever. Sir John laid his hand on her arm.

"Miss Stranlay, you must keep up. We can't be far now from some town or village or a trapper's hut."

"You're spoiling all our chances because you won't act together," Clair said.

There was a silence. Sinclair looked at the volcanoes, looked at Clair. "That's true, Miss Stranlay . . . I'm sorry, Mullaghan."

"And I, Doctor Sinclair."

The waterfall was like a silver pillar in a dark Pagan temple

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The American turned again and led them onward.

Suddenly they found themselves in the lee of one of the foot-hills, under the mouths of two great caves.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LAIR

"WE DON'T know what may be in them," said Sir John Mullaghan.

They stood and looked at the cave-mouths. They stood almost in darkness, in a thin line of light, a space-time illusion of luminosity, for the sun had quite vanished. Hesitating, they peered at one another in the false twilight. A little stream of water, hardly seen, ran coldly over Clair's toes. She felt more ill than ever.

"What can there be? There are no animals in this country. Do let's get out of the rain—it's coming on again".

"Can't you smell?" said Sinclair.

Clair elevated her small rain-beaded nose and smelled. A faint yet acrid odor impinged on the rainy evening. Ammoniac. "Like the Zoo lion-house," said Sinclair, very low, staring at the near cave-mouth.

The armaments manufacturer showed his latent quality. He bent down, groped at his feet and straightened with a large stone in his hand. He motioned them aside. Clair stood still. Sinclair seized her roughly by the shoulder and pulled her to one side of the near cave-mouth.

"Come out!"

The stone crashed remotely in the bowels of the cave, ricochetted in darkness, stirred a multitude of echoes. Nothing else. The twilight vanished. They stood in the soft sweep of the rain, listening.

"I'll step into the mouth and try my lighter on a bit of my underclothes," said Sir John practically.

"All right." The American's voice imperturbable.

Clair could see neither of them now. But Sinclair's shoulder touched hers. She heard cautious, barefoot treadings in the dark. Sir John had left them. Clair thought, 'Oh, God, why doesn't he hurry?' Her thoughts blurred. She leaned against Sinclair. "Sh!"

The forward darkness spat sparks intermittently. The lighter. *Spat. Spat.* Something dirty white. A catch. Vigorous blowing. A glow. The mouth of the cave. Porous-looking rock. Sir John Mullaghan's face. His voice.

"It winds inward. I'll go and see if there's anything."

"All right."

Clair said, "No, you don't. Doctor Sinclair thinks he's protecting me. I don't need it." She prodded her protector. "Go with him."

His support was withdrawn. "Keep where you are."

A faint glow, over-gloomed by a titanic shadow, illumined the cave-mouth. Between her and that glow passed another tenebrous Titan. The glow failed, lighted up again, receded. Alone. Soft swish of rain. Clair began to count, found herself swaying, shook herself out of counting. "Makes you sleepy." A long wait and then suddenly Sinclair's voice close at hand, "Miss Stranlay!"

"Hello?"

"Give me your hand." She found herself drawn forward. "Careful."

"Nothing inside?"

"Not a thing except a queer kind of nest."

She stumbled in blackness. "Has the light gone out?"

"The cave twists."

The ground underfoot had a porous feeling: it was as though one walked over the surface of a frozen sponge. A few more steps and Sinclair, by the aid of disjointed gropings with his disengaged hand, guided Clair round a corner of the ante-cave. She saw then a roof nine or ten feet high overarching a cave-chamber something of the size and appearance of her own small drawing-room in Kensington. It glittered grayly. On the uneven floor, tending a small fire that seemed to be fed with his undergarments and a pile of ancient hay, squatted Sir John Mullaghan, naked to the waist. In the far leftward corner was a hummock. The "nest."

"All right, Miss Stranlay?"

"As rain, Sir John." Clair stumbled again. Sinclair pushed her past the fire. She sank down on the nest. Its straw crackled dustily under her weight. The fire, Sir John, and Sinclair began to pace a hasting gavotte. Clair closed her eyes.

"I'm going to faint."

She did.

SHE passed from the faint into a sleep, and awoke several hours later, Sinclair's hand shaking her.

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"Miss Stranlay . . . I'm afraid it's going to spring—"

She sat up with twinging body, brushing back the hair from her face. The American crouched beside her, a red-ochered shadow in the light of the fire, his head turned toward the fire. The fire itself burned and sputtered sulkily under a strange, brittle heaping of fuel. And beyond its light, in the darkness, glowed another light.

Two of them. Unwinking. Clair felt and acid saliva collect in her mouth. Suddenly the two lights changed position: they had sunk lower toward the floor of the cave. Clair understood. It was crouching.

"Don't scream."

Sinclair's words were in a whisper. But the Thing in the darkness beyond the fire must have heard them. Its eyes reared up again. Clair shut her own; opened them again. The eyes were again sinking. Spring this time?

And then the fire took a hand. It spiraled upward a long trail of smoke, red-glowing gas which burst into crackling flame. There came a violent sneeze, a snarl, the thump of a heavy body crashing against the side of the cave in a backward leap. And then the three survivors of the *Magellan's Cloud* saw—saw for a moment a bunched, barred, gigantic body, a coughing, snarling, malignant face. Then a rushing patter filled the cave. The fire died down. Beyond its light no eyes now glowed in the darkness.

Clair sank on her elbow. "What was it?"

Some one beyond Sinclair drew a long breath. "A tiger."

Sinclair spoke very quietly. "Like one, but it wasn't."

"What was it, then?" Clair saw Sir John Mullaghan also crouching, a keyed-up shadow.

The American, answering, still stared across the fire. "*Machœrodus.*"

"What?"

"*Machœrodus*—a saber-toothed tiger."

There fell a moment's silence—of stupefaction on the part of all three. Clair, ill, closed her eyes and opened them again. She must be dreaming. "But—it can't be. They're extinct."

"Didn't you see the tusks?"

She had. So had Sir John. The latter got to his feet. He spoke and moved doubtfully.

"It may come back."

The fire purred and crackled again. He had fed it from a pile of fuel not in the cave when they first entered it. The American got up and helped him. Clair's head, sleep-weighted, sank again on the nest. She thought, "I'm dreaming. Don't care though it's a mammoth next time." The smell of the fuel was nauseating. She voiced a sleepy question, and, voicing it, was asleep, and never heard Sinclair's answer.

"What are you burning?"

"Bones."

WHEN next she awoke, she was in complete darkness. No fire burned near at hand. She had a sense of having slept for many hours. She stretched, cautiously, remembering everything. A keen cool current of air blew steadily in her face.

If that three-day Odyssey across the deserted savanna was a dream? . . . She was at home in Kensington. . . . Wrapped in a quilt, lying in fusty hay? She called cautiously: "Doctor Sinclair!"

No answer. She released her left arm, and sought in the place where he had crouched while they looked at the Eyes beyond the fire. Her fingers touched bare rock. She sat up, a little frightened, desperately hungry.

"*Doctor Sinclair!*"

A far-off voice called, "Coming, Miss Stranlay."

Footsteps, and the darkness receding from the light of a smoky torch, held in Sinclair's hand. In his other he carried a shapeless bundle.

She said, "Goodnees, nice to see you. Where's the fire? Have I slept long?"

Sinclair's mind said, absorbedly, and for the second or third time in looking at her, thinking, "Pretty thing!" Tousled red-tipped hair, comely sleep-flushed face, clear, friendly, questioning eyes. Miraculous to wake from sleep like that. . . . Aloud: "The fire's in the outer half of the cave. It's about noon."

"You *are* a dear—though you try so desperately not to be."

The dear grunted.

Clair's eyes twinkled at him. "Is that a smell of something cooking?"

"We've found some food."

She had remembered the beast that had stalked them in the dark hours. Had there been any beast? She snatched up the torch and walked past the ashes of the fire. On the damp floor were multitudes of impressions and superimposed

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on these great pug-marks of a big cat.

"A saber-toothed tiger!"

She picked up the eider-down quilt and groped her way through to the front part of the cave, and so came in sight of it suddenly, the entrance flooded with sunlight, and against that sunlight a hazy drift of smoke, as from the lips of a contemplative smoker, engendered by the fire. Either side of this fire sat Sinclair Sir John—Sinclair in his ragged pajamas, Sir John with his slight form even slighter than of yore. Minus underclothes.

Neither of them heard her coming and she stood for a moment and looked at them with some little modification of that gay, ironic, contemplative scrutiny she usually turned upon the world. Their lives had interwoven in hers with a dreamlike abruptness and intimacy.

"Sinclair—no more a gentleman than you're a lady," she thought. "No more an American than you're an Englishwoman. Why? Fifty years ago we might have been both—the tricks are easy enough to learn. . . . Sir John—no doubt about him. A lost aristo who's mislaid his guillotine and ruffles. . . ."

Sinclair—he had begun to fray badly, poor boy. Soon be a catastrophe with that sleeping-suit of his. The faces of both men were lined with stubble, an unchancy harvest, Sir John's a red wiriness of vegetal promise, with hints of gray, Sinclair's a blue-black down. Their hair stood up in tufts and feathers. But both of them seemed to have washed, and Clair noted the fact with an interest that put an end to her survey.

"Morning, Sir John. I've already met you, Doctor. . . . Oh, not in the wilds." She motioned them to sit, but flushed a little with a touch of reminiscent wonder. The cosmopolitan had been at least as quick as the aristo. . . . "Where did you get the food?"

Sir John was toasting on a sliver of wood a strange-looking, yellowish piece of meat. Sinclair bent his dark poll over a roundish, smooth-polished object. Sir John seemed to hesitate a second in his reply.

"Doctor Sinclair found it, Miss Stranlay. We've already eaten some, but you slept too soundly to be awakened. Better now?"

Something funny about this meat. "Yes, much." She stared at Sir John's preparations. "*Found* it?"

The American glanced up impatiently. "Nothing mysterious. It won't poison you —I saw to that. It's horse-flesh. There was a partly eaten carcass about a hundred yards from the mouth of the cave here."

"Oh! So I didn't dream last night. There was a beast like a tiger prowling on the other side of the fire?"

The armaments manufacturer held up the skewer of yellowish meat, looking the most incongruous of cooks as he did so. "Yes. Some kind of tiger. It probably killed the pony after it ceased to stalk us." Clair regarded her breakfast uncertainly.

"I think I'll wash first. Both of you have. Where?"

"Just outside the cave, to the left."

Clair went out. Sinclair looked after looked at Sir John, said something. The armaments manufacturer rose up and followed Clair. She glanced round from bending over the streamlet that had gurgled over her feet the night before.

"I'm sorry, Miss Stranlay, but one of us had better be near. That beast may come back, though it's not very likely."

"I see." Clair felt and sounded ungracious—and, as usual, regretted it. She looked away, across the tundra flowering into swamp, at the sun-hazed surface of the mile-distant forest, and then southward, where swamp and forest crept down to the foot-hills, and their long journey through the llanos-land seemed to end. What was beyond that cul-de-sac? . . . She became aware of Sir John waiting. "Sorry. Shan't keep you a minute. Do wish I had some soap."

"There's red earth on the bank here. I used it. It seemed fairly effective."

He thought she looked like an absurd boy in her thin stained garments. Not at all as he had pictured her. For he had heard of Clair Stranlay before that meeting on the beach, had once, on a train-journey, read one of her books. Crude, calamitous, vicious thing. Very vivid, too. . . . How had he pictured her? A dark and beetle-like best-seller, perhaps, or one of those blowsy overplump women you meet in French magazines. Instead, this charming, impertinent boy. . . .

HE SIGHED and turned away from that thought. He turned his head away from her also, looking round the deserted countryside. The sun seemed warmer. A little breeze stirred the long grass. The stream glimmered and its gurgling passage was the only sound to

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be heard. And the same thought came to him as to Clair: What lay south? What country was this, with wild ponies and tigers? Tigers? A saber-tooth? But that was absurd. Probably some freak animal.

He became aware of Clair standing beside him, dabbing at her face and hands with a bunch of grass. "That was good . . . Sir John."

He looked gently into her grave eyes. "*What* country is this? It can't be Canada. And it can't be Africa."

He shook his head. "I'm afraid I haven't an opinion worth knowing, Miss Stranlay. Tigers, I think, are found in the East Indies. But to suppose the *Magellan's Cloud* drifted across the Atlantic, America and the Pacific in those few hours four nights ago is absurd. And I can not imagine this stretch of uninhabited country in the East Indies."

Clair finished dabbing, retied the fraying neck-loop of her jacket. "No. But we must be getting near some inhabited place."

"I hope so."

He wouldn't say more than that, though her eyes still questioned him. They went back to the cave. A smudge of smoke, fainter now, for the fire was dying down, rose from it against the limestone hillside. Sinclair was standing in the sunlight at the mouth of the second cave, looking intently southward, as both of them had done. He came and joined them. Clair was surprised at the look on his usually dour face. It was alive with some strayed excitement.

"Feel hungry?" he asked her.

"Shockingly." But indeed her appetite felt oddly reserved. She sat down beside the fire, but still in the sunlight. She picked up the piece of charred horseflesh and began to eat it. Sir John stayed outside, leaning against the cave-entrance, his graying head down-bent. "How did you manage to cut it up?"

"With this." Sinclair was back at the other side of the fire. He held up an object. Clair peered at it. Passed it to her. She turned it over, wonderingly.

It was a fragment of stone, she thought, though it was flint. Even to her unaccustomed eyes it seemed to have a certain artificiality. She held it away from her with her left hand, the while she fed her small stained mouth with the right. She saw the shape of the thing better then. It was in the form of a smooth-butted ax-blade — an incredibly crude stone ax-blade.

"Why—it's *made*."

The American nodded. "It's *made*."

"Where did you find it?"

"In the next cave. Among a pile of bones."

She remembered something. She questioned him with her eyes. He nodded.

"Human bones. Though I didn't know that in the darkness last night when I was searching for fuel. Fortunately I didn't burn them all."

She looked at the thing at his feet,

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and somehow didn't want any more of the horse-flesh. It was a skull he had been examining. She stood up and went to the entrance. Sir John glanced at her. Something like a smile of sympathy flickered over his face.

The American said abruptly: "You people."

They both turned. Sinclair had the skull in his hands. He came toward them. The stone ax-blade slipped out of Clair's forgetful hand as she backed away from the skull. Sinclair sprang forward and caught it, bruising his fingers. He swore. Sir John turned his head; Clair tried hard to repress herself, failed; giggled. Sir John's laughter joined with hers.

"I'm sorry." Genuinely contrite.

"All right. I want to talk to you both about these finds." He addressed Sir John, still with something of an effort. "Know anything about crania?"

Sir John shook his head. "Nothing at all." He took the skull in his hand, however, and examined it. It was complete to jaw-bone and teeth. He held it out to Clair. She waved it away.

"No thanks. Ghastly thing. It's got a permanent frown, too."

Sinclair: "Exactly. That's the point. It's not an ordinary skull."

The other two regarded it, back in Sinclair's hands.

"A savage's?" said Clair helpfully.

"Of course it's a savage's. Otherwise he wouldn't have had a flint hand-ax in his possession when he was carried back in there and devoured by the saber-tooth."

Clair shivered. "Was that what happened?" She looked over the undulating waste of grass to the dark holes of the sun-crowned forest. "Ugh!"

Sir John glanced at her, and interposed gently: "And what is peculiar about the skull?"

"It's as Miss Stranlay says. It has a permanent frown—look, this ridge above the eyes. And practically no forehead. Look at the teeth."

They looked. "Funny," said Clair, at once repulsed and fascinated. Sinclair closed the jaw again, set the skull at his feet, stared at it, fascinated also.

"Not a human skull at all, you know, as we understand the term human. By rights it belongs to a race that died off twenty thousand years ago."

Clair was startled into dim memories of casual reading in prehistory. "What race?"

"The Neanderthal. It's a Neanderthal skull."

BY EARLY afternoon they had left the caves some four or five miles behind, and, tramping along the edge of the foothills, were nearing the spot where hills and forest converged. Sinclair, as usual, walked in advance. He was burdened with the remains of the horse-flesh, a great haunch, and the cord of his pajamas-shorts sagged under the weight of the flint ax-head. The strange skull he had abandoned.

Clair and Sir John walked side by side, half a dozen yards behind him. Sir John said, "I'm afraid we're rather a drag on our leader. By the way, have you noticed how much alike your names are—Clair and Sinclair?"

She looked after the long-striding figure of the American, and unconsciously increased her own pace. "He's the saint and I'm the Clair. . . . *Is* energetic. I'm sure that's why they used to martyr saints." (But it wouldn't do to discuss one with the other.) "What did you think of the skull?"

"I don't know what to think. Though I should imagine that the chances are Doctor Sinclair has made a mistake."

"Neanderthal man. . . . They all died off in the last Glacial Age—I think. Or was it just after it? Perhaps it was a fossil skull."

The armaments manufacturer, striding barefoot, bowed-shouldered beside her, shook his head. "No, it wasn't that. I'm afraid I know little or nothing of such matters, but it was comparatively fresh bone."

"Funny if there are any more of them about."

Sir John also thought that, but did not say so. Funny? The coarse grass was warm and dry under their feet. The last of the volcanoes had disappeared on the northward horizon. Sinclair slowed down till they caught up with him. He pointed.

They were at a slight elevation by then. The forest did not close completely on the hills, but left a narrow corridor, a waste, bush-strewn space. Across this space they looked, and it was as if they were at no slight elevation, but on a mountain-side. For beyond the passageway the land failed completely, as it seemed.

Yet, remote and far away, downward, southward, something like a lake shimmered, forest-fringed; and, blue and

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golden, there shone under the sunlight a suggestion of immense tracts of waste country. All three of the travelers stared, Clair with sinking heart. It must be miles to that lake. And no sign anywhere of a native village or trading-station.

"We're on a high level—a plateau with mountains," said Sinclair unemotionally. "We've been traveling across it for days. That's why we've seen few animals, probably. There's nothing here but strays from down there."

Sir John said, "And we're going down?"

"Yes."

Clair smiled at the American, casually, friendlily. "There's no 'yes' about it. Not until we've all made up our minds."

Sinclair's ears tinted themselves a slow red. "*I* am going down."

"Do."

Sir John interposed. "Really, Miss Stranlay, I don't think there is anything else to be done now. . . . Though possibly Doctor Sinclair might word his invitations a little more courteously in the future."

Sinclair scowled at him angrily. "Courtesy! Do you realize we're absolutely lost somewhere in absolutely unknown and unexplored country? That there are *machærodi* and possibly other wild beasts in it—to say nothing of Neanderthalers?"

"That seems to be the case," said Clair. "But it doesn't alter the fact that your manners are badly in need of improvement."

He glanced from one to the other of them, as though he were looking at idiots. He shrugged. "All right. Bad though they may be, I think it would be ruinous if we split into two parties." He bowed, a ludicrous angry figure. "Would you mind coming down into the low country, Miss Stranlay?"

Clair had a ridiculous impulse and a lovable singing voice—a deep untrained contralto. They stared at her startled as she held out her arms and smiled at the wild lands below them:

"Oh, ye'll take the high road,
And I'll take the low road,
And I'll be in Scotland afore ye;
But me and my true love,
We'll never meet again
On the bonny, bonny banks of Loch
Lomond!"

She felt her eyes grown moist involuntarily.

Sir John said gently, "Thank you, Miss Stranlay."

"Silly," Clair confessed.

"Not silly at all, Miss Stranlay." It was Sinclair unexpectedly. "Thank you also. I was a lout."

"You're a dear," said Clair soberly, and for the second time that day.

IT WAS a steeply shelving descent of nearly a mile, over the usual coarse grass. At the foot Sinclair waited—as usual. He avoided Clair's eyes. He had avoided them since that remark. "We have about an hour until sunset."

Sir John, panting, sat down. "And what are we going to do until then?"

The American seemed for once at a loss. "Find a place to camp, I suppose."

"Looks different somehow," said Clair.

It did. The forest was more widely spread or the tundra more enforested, according to one's fancy. Some oaks—young-looking oaks—grew near at hand. Smooth hog-backed hills rose here and there in the tree-set waste, but there were no mountains, no volcanoes. Also, near sunset though it was, this low country was much warmer than the plateau they had just deserted. Nor was it so silent.

A long-necked gray bird flitted among the oaks; they could hear the swish of its wings through the leaves. Remote among the low smooth-humped hills a vast long-drawn moan rose and fell; they had not noticed it at first, because it was part of the landscape. Now, as it ceased, they peered in the direction from which it had come.

"A cow," said Clair.

It did indeed sound like the lowing of a cow—a gigantic cow. Presently it ceased with some decision, and was not resumed. Sinclair stood with his fingers on his hand-ax. "Bison, perhaps."

"What *is* this place, Doctor Sinclair?"

The question worried all three of them continually. Clair put it into words most frequently. Sir John glanced up at her, then at the ragged bearer of the horse-haunch. The latter started.

"Eh? . . . God knows."

"I doubt it," said Clair.

The American began to move across the grass toward the trees. Clair held out her hand to Sir John, but he stood up without assistance, albeit with a grimace. Presently they were threading a new belt of trees, very green and lush with undergrowth, and with their shadows pointing long dark fingers into the west. The gray bird was silent. So was all else of

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the hidden life of the tree-spaces—if there were life. Clair heard herself in a whisper:

"Where are we going?"

Sinclair's voice also was low. "Some place where there's water."

They emerged from the trees then, into another clearing. Doing so, Clair seemed to hear a sound of low rumblings, like the borborygmus in a large and placid stomach. She thought rather ruefully, "Not mine." And went on, following the sunset-reddened back of Sinclair. Neither he nor Sir John had heard anything.

But suddenly they did. Fallen boughs crunched and snapped, and something with a heavy tread came after them from the twilight darkness of the trees.

They all halted, looking back. For a moment they could distinguish nothing, though the heavy tread paced toward them. And then they saw it against the dun light of an open patch—its swaying bulk, it matted shagginess. Its trunk was lowered, sniffing the track they had taken.

They stared appalled. They had all seen its like before—in this or that museum or illustration. There could be no mistaking those curved immensities of tusk.

It was a mammoth.

CHAPTER FIVE

"AND I'LL TAKE THE LOW ROAD"

THEY camped a quarter of an hour or so later, by the mere of the lake that had glittered its invitation from the northern plateau. Tall reeds grew far out into the water, and, remotely over that water, unknown birds croaked and dipped amid long grasses that Sinclair certified were—of all things—wild wheat. The American knelt under the moss-shaggy boughs of a great oak, coaxing Sir John's lighter to embed a spark in a tuft of withered grass. Sunset was again close—the lingering sunset of a temperate country. It might have been eight o'clock in the evening.

Clair padded to and fro, bough-collecting, with her bare feet just a little chilled by the evening dew. Sir John, outside the obscuring bulk of the oak, was looking back to the dimness of the plateau brow—that high land where they had adventured through three long days.

And the mammoth continued to watch them.

It was halted at a distance of ten yards or so, not facing them, but in profile. Its great ears flapped meditatively and every now and then its trunk would stray upward into the foliage of a bush, or down into the unappetizing grass. The sunset glimmered on its watching eye. . . .

It had trailed them like a great retriever, halting when they halted, coming on again as they moved hesitatingly away. While they crossed a clear space it would stop and watch them, pawing a little, rubbing a gigantic hair-fringed shoulder against a tree. Then it would pace swingingly after them. Once, apparently imagining them lost, it had frolicked wildly amid the bushes, hunting the scent of them with uplifted trunk.

"It must be harmless," Clair had whispered, walking between the two men.

"Trying to summon up courage to charge," hazarded Sinclair.

"Hope it comes of a timid family."

"I'm afraid we can't do anything to prevent it charging, anyhow," said Sir John, glancing over his shoulder and starting a little. ". . . I thought it was coming that time."

But it had not, and, the lake opening out before them, there had been no other course obvious than to camp. It was eery doing so with that watching monster pretending not to watch them. Clair knelt by Sinclair with a handful of twigs, seeing he had caught a spark and was cherishing the grass into the parturition of a flame.

He glanced at her. "The fire may scare it off or may madden it into making an attack. Scoot round the back of the tree if it comes." He spoke in a whisper. "Frightened?"

Clair fed the flame with a twig, resolutely keeping her eyes from the watcher. "Not now. Rather a thrill. . . . What's it doing now?"

Sir John came to their side. "I think it's going to charge."

The mammoth had knelt on its knees, embedding its immense tusks in a great clump of grass. There came a crackling, tearing sound. The mammoth stood up. Its tusks were laden with grass, like the rake of a hay-maker. Elevating its trunk to the fodder, it proceeded to test and devour great wisps.

"Bless it," said Clair, "it's having its supper."

The armaments manufacturer ruffled his gray hair. "One certainly didn't expect such mildness. A *mammoth!*"

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There the brute stood, real enough, feeding and watching them, with the brown night closing down behind him. The flame came now in little spurts and glows and the twigs caught; cautiously, Sinclair administered first small branches, then larger ones. The firelight went out across the gloaming shadows, splashing gently on the red-brown coat and bare, creased skull of the mammoth. It paused for a little in its eating, turning its trunk toward them. Then resumed. Clair sat down.

"A mammoth in the twentieth century! It's—oh, it's ridiculous."

Sir John, standing and looking at the watcher, patted her shoulder. Sinclair hacked at the dried horse-meat with the Neanderthal ax. The meat had a faint smell of decay. He said, "I've been thinking about where we are. I know now it can't be Canada."

"And it certainly is not Africa, as I thought at first," murmured Sir John.

"No. I think we're in Patagonia."

CLAIR drew back warmed toes from the fire. Abruptly the last of the daylight went. The lake misted from a pale sheen to a dark, rippling mystery. The sound of the mammoth feeding was oddly homely. . . . Patagonia?

"But I understand practically all of it has been explored," said Sir John.

Sinclair toasted yellow meat for a moment. "I don't think so. Delusion we North Americans and English have about every country which is shown plainly on a map, with the main mountains and rivers and a political coloring. We can't get it into our heads that these places are much larger than a home country. And of course—"

He stopped and frowned at the piece of meat. He addressed Clair. He still avoided, as far as possible, speaking directly to Sir John Mullaghan.

"Did you notice from the plateau brow the mere tips of a mountain range—they must be more than fifty miles away—down there in the south, Miss Stranlay?"

Clair nodded.

"I think they must be the Andes. We're somewhere in the western Argentine or the foot-hills of Chili—the country where Pritchard went to hunt the great sloth. We may be traversing a mountain kink or fold that up to this time has completely escaped notice."

Clair thought. Then: "A kink with saber-toothed tigers and fresh Neanderthal skulls in it—and also mammoths?"

"All possible." But his voice sounded less certain.

Sir John said: "But not very probable. We landed on a seacoast somewhere, went inland and turned south. That seacoast, if this is South America, must have been the Atlantic. And Patagonia, if my memory serves me, is remote from the Atlantic. Also, it has grown warmer the farther south we have come. If we are south of the equator it ought to grow colder."

Sinclair detached the piece of meat from its wooden skewer and handed it to Clair. He nodded acknowledgment of Sir John's arguments and was silent. All three of them sat and ate the tough meat. Then, stumbling among the reeds, they went down to the lake in search of water. At a spot that glimmered faintly Sinclair lay down full length and drank. Sir John followed suit. Clair squatted and cupped the water in her hands and drank that way. As they came back to the fire they noted the mammoth still in guardianship. Overhead there was a faint pearliness in the darkness of the sky.

Sir John raked about in the shadows outside the fire, collecting damp grass and arranging it for drying to act as pillows and mattresses. Clair sat a yard or so from Sinclair, looking into the fire, drowsy and still a little hungry after her meager ration of horseflesh. Sinclair had procured a long bough from amid the tree-litter and was whittling at it doggedly with the flint-ax.

"Stone Age idyl," murmured Clair.

"Eh?"

She repeated the words, and, as she did so, remote away beyond the lake, strange and eery, that lowing they had heard in the early afternoon broke out again. It rose and belled and fell, the calling of some stray of a Titan herd.

Unexpectedly, for he had been quiet enough until then, the mammoth answered, lifting his trunk in the remote washings of the firelight and trumpeting screamingly.

Clair thought her ear-drums would burst. She covered them and heard the noise die down. The ensuing quietness held no hint of distant lowing.

But to Clair, with it dead, there came an almost passionate wish that it would break out again. She looked at the two men, at the darkness around them, at the bulk of the strange beast that guarded them so queerly. That lowing and

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wild trumpeting seemed to have torn down a barrier inside her heart—that calling across wild spaces heard in the shelter of the camp-fire. . . . She had heard it before, somewhere, at some time, in an era that knew not print and publishers. Often. And of all sounds it had lived with her through changes innumerable. She had heard it before in lives not her own.

Fantastic dream!

"Miss Stranlay!" Sir John's hand on her shoulder. "You'd best lie down if you're so sleepy. You nearly fell into the fire."

"DID I?"

She shook herself and looked at them. Sinclair, hafting his ax-head on the bough and binding it with sinews he had saved from the tiger-killed pony, had half-risen to catch her just as Sir John forestalled him. He sank down again. The armaments manufacturer, padding about barefoot, arranged the grass beds. He looked over at Clair, hearing her low laugh.

"Nothing much, Sir John. But I'd just said to Doctor Sinclair, before that trumpeting started, that this was a Stone Age idyl. And just now I caught sight of your clothes."

The firelight twinkled on a gray head and the smile on a gentle cultured face. "And they don't fit the part?"

"Not very well."

The American laughed shortly. "The warrior was the armaments manufacturer of the Stone Age, Miss Stranlay, and no doubt wore appropriate habiliments."

Clair felt a little pang of shame for him. The fire simmered cheerfully. Sir John straightened and looked across at the deportee.

"Yes, the warrior was probably the equivalent of the armaments manufacturer," he said quietly. "He brought order and a livable relationship into primitive anarchy. And his task isn't yet finished."

Clair said: "Perhaps it hasn't begun in this country yet. . . . Funniest nightmare of a country we've landed in! I'd give anything for clothes and a bathroom an electric light and—oh, for a cigarette!"

She paused and tried to put into unfacile words that strange aching that had been in her heart on hearing the lowing in the distant hills. She looked at Sinclair's and Mullaghan's listening faces.

"But there's something in it that's not terrifying at all. Lovely, rather. The silence and starkness. . . . Those primitives of the Old Stone Age—they had some elemental contacts with beauty that we've lost forever."

Sir John Mullaghan sat clasping his knees, rubbing his chilled bare feet. He shook his head. "They had this kind of country, perhaps, but it was not the country you see with your civilized, romantic eyes, Miss Stranlay. It was a waste for ghouls for them. The night was a horror to the squatting-places—the time when the dead Old Men of the tribes returned as stalking carnivora, the time of shuddering fear.

"It was a life livable only for the strongest and most brutal. For thousands and thousands of years life was that only. And here and there rose the soldier and the inventor, the men who subjected the squalid and lowly, who built the first classes and sowed the first seeds. And the long climb from the filth and futility of the night-time camps began."

"Poor ancestors!" Clair said it soberly, her eyes on the night.

Sinclair finished binding his ax, and laid it on his knees and looked into the fire.

"That was the life of the Stone Age savage, Miss Stranlay. And the strong men and the wise men, and the warriors and the witch-doctors, bound him in chains of taboo—the first laws—and made him less of a beast. For twenty thousand years they've fashioned new chains for him, till civilized man has taken the place of the savage. But it's been no simple case of design.

"The old, meaningless taboos and loyalties—once necessary and just—are things that threaten to strangle us nowadays. The age of the witch-doctor and the warrior is over. But they won't believe it. They still preach their obscene gods and raised and equip armies that now threaten to smash to atoms the foundations of civilization. It is they who are the ghouls who haunt the contemporary world."

Sir John said steadily: "They are the ghouls, if you like, that guard civilization. The strong man keeps his house and the wise country an army on the *qui vive*. The soldier is civilization's safeguard, and still, thank God, defends it against anarchic sentimentalists. . . . Do you people know nothing of the beast that is in human nature unless there is force and

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discipline to keep it down? I had a daughter once. Twelve years of age. Bright and clean and very glad to be alive. Like Miss Stranlay in some ways. . . . She was missing one night. She was found under some bushes a mile or so away from home next day. She had been murdered by a tramp."

Clair made an inarticulate sound of sympathy. Sinclair's knuckles whitened round his ax-haft. "I have seen humans murdered and mutilated in thousands. And through no chance accident of madness. Sentimentalist? My good God, you old men! Sentimentalists we are then, and our fight is for human sanity. Don't think we shirk facts. And we've learned from experience.

"We know that man's a fighting animal by nature, that cruelty's his birth-right; and we also know that what keeps us in the pit as animals are the armies and the armaments. We're out to smash both, we who have had some personal experience of both. And being that'll send a bullet into the brain of every clown who preaches war in future, Sir John—and a bomb into the office of every armaments manufacturer who trades in blood and human agony. . . . It is you and your kind who will not let the ape and tiger die. And they're prepared for your challenge."

Clair's voice startled them. "I had a fiancé in 1917. A boy. He'd have hated to hurt the hatefullest human on earth. He went to France because I taunted him. He died on the barb-wire at Mametz. All night. He screamed my name all night. . . . And at heart he was just a savage filled with lust and cruelty?"

They said nothing, uncomfortably. Clair thought, suddenly weary, "Idiotic to speak about that. Oh, my dear, my dear, that's a time long gone, and I can't do anything for you now. . . ."

She leaned back with her hands under her head. They had all three forgotten the mammoth. Now they heard its steady munching. Clair thought, with a reckless change to gaiety, "It'll have tummy-ache if it's not careful." She said, "There come the stars. We're hopelessly lost, but they're still the same as ever."

Unchanged, indeed, and remote and cold as ever. As though a lampman walked the dark space of the night they kindled in groups and constellations. The night was very still and cloudless. It was not yet moonrise. The evening star burned palely beyond the stance of the drowsily shuffling mammoth. And over the darkness of the untrodden lands to the south Jupiter hung like a twinkling ball of fire.

IN THE morning the mammoth was gone. There was no trace of it but the trampled stretch of grass and a great heap of dung. Wakening the first of the three, Clair thought she heard remote trumpetings. But whether these were memories from night-time dreams, or the farewell callings of their mysterious guardian, there was nothing now in the quietude of the morning to tell her.

The fire was a gray fluff. They had slept beyond the first chill of the dawn, and the sunshine, like early spring sunshine in the grays and greens of England, sprayed through the lattice-patterns of the oak boughs. The reeds that hid the lake stood in long battalions, peering into the sunrise, with the urge behind them of a little wind from the places of the earth that morning had not yet touched.

Sinclair slept near Clair with his arms outflung and begrimed, his bearded face hid in his shoulder. Clair reached and touched that shoulder with the tips of her fingers, found it cold, pulled the eider-down quilt over it, and stood up.

Sir John Mullaghan slept huddled in his stained coat, his gray-streaked hair ruffed every now and then by a stray waft of wind from the places of the sunset.

Clair wondered if she should make a fire. But either Sinclair or Sir John had the lighter. She moved about under the oak, and farther into the bushes, collecting twigs. She found a stretch of gorse-bushes, very yellow and scented, still wet with night-mist. It was as she stood among them that the lark began to sing.

It was at first no more than a remote piping up in the gray pearlment of the sky. But it came nearer, and the sound hovered, and shading her eyes, it seemed to Clair that she saw the fluttering singer for a moment. She stood and listened and found herself weeping. She dropped the bundle of fire-wood and, weeping, stood in that morning listening to the amazing sound. Shrill and strange and sweet, the piping of youth unforgotten! . . . And they took that youth and smeared it with filths of the years, murdered it on barb-wire entanglements, gave it to torture and horrific agonies in the hands of lust-crazed lunatics. . . .

Clair thought: "But even so, we've

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heard it. It's worth having heard it though the memory torture us all our lives."

It died away. Clair picked up the firewood and went back to the camping-place. The men still slept. For a little she considered them and then went down through the dark, seeping peat-edges to the mere of the lake. A bird flew out of the reeds as she approached. A kingfisher. From her feet the cold of the ground spread up through her body. Accustomed though she was, she shivered in the sunlight. She bent and touched the water and found it—"wet, of course. And cold enough. Doesn't matter. I'm too filthy for description."

She undressed, a simple matter, and waded out, into a clamoring pain of coldness. Her hair fell over her face and she switched her mind to that matter as the water rose higher, over her knees, creeping upward. . . . "Getting long, and where will you find a barber's shop? Unless Sinclair operates with his flint-ax. . . . Now? Deep enough?" She halted, half-knelt, and then flung herself forward.

Deep enough.

She swam into the sunrise through a long lane in the reeds. Beyond that lane, cramp caught her right arm for a moment and she struggled with it, a little frightened, until it passed. The lake swept to the horizon almost, she saw, though from its surface there was no sign of Sinclair's Andes. . . . Alligators?

But there seemed nothing living in the region of the lake, apart from the skimming kingfishers. She turned round at last and swam toward the remote solitary oak. As she did so she suffered from the curious illusion that it waved to and fro, violently, as in a high wind. A thin pencil-point of smoke was rising. It did the same.

"Curious. Something wrong with your heart?"

Soberly, she reached the shore and dressed, and went through the reeds, hearing the anxious calling to Sinclair and Sir John, whom an earthquake of considerable intensity had disturbed in the preparation of breakfast.

CLAIR thought: "We are in the Hollow Land."

There were high hills both to right and left now as they pressed south. For four or five miles they kept to the bank of the lake, but that was soon left behind, a radiance that presently betook itself from the earth to the sky. The leftward hills were the farther away, and between them rose and fell in long undulations a crazy scraping of nullahs. Underfoot was the long grass, but of finer texture here than on the northward plateau, growing in places lush and emerald, especially where some stream hesitated and crept and slept and woke and shook itself and meandered uncertainly amid the llano.

It was a land of streams. They forded three—one at a trampled place, where were the imprints of both tiny hoofs and great paws.

"Why are we still going south?" Clair asked once.

"Because we might as well," the American returned broodingly.

Sir John suffered from agonies of stomach-ache throughout that day. He walked beside Clair with distorted face and frequently distorted body. Several times he sat down while the other two stood and waited. Sinclair could do nothing for him—or at least offered to do nothing. Neither he nor Clair had as yet been affected by the saltless diet of horse-flesh. But the surviving piece quite definitely began to smell undaintily. It was fortunate that the country seemed almost entirely devoid of insects.

Sinclair carried his ax-blade hafted now on a five-foot pole. He stalked a sound in the bushes with it once, only to disturb a long tawny shape which snarled at him sleepily. Then it turned and slunk unhurriedly into deeper cover. Sinclair, rather pale, rejoined the other two.

"What was it?" Clair asked.

He glanced at Sir John. "A lion."

They went on. Once, far toward the leftward hills, and beyond the nullahs, they heard that lowing break out again. Plangent and plaintive. Several times herds of small deer, such as they had twice seen on the plateau, were observable at a distance, feeding with some daintiness and apparent enjoyment.

Clair looked at them carnivorously. But the wind went steadily south and at the first whiff of the travelers, and long before Sinclair could near them, the deer had gone.

"How many more meals?" Clair asked the American, looking without appetite at the shrinking haunch of horse-flesh. Sinclair had dropped back from his old position in the van and walked beside the other two now.

"Two, I think."

Sir John, padding along in pain, grim-

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aced. "You may count it three. I—I don't think I'll be hungry for some time."

"Oh, the doctor may be able to stalk something fresh," said Clair.

Instead, it was something fresh that presently stalked them, though they never caught sight of it. The noise of its padding pursuit and appraisal began to the right of a long corridor of bushes. The three went on for a little while, and then halted, listening. The stalker had halted also. In the sunshine silence they heard the noise of its heavy breathing. And a sound of a *swish-swish* among the leaves ("It's tail,") thought Clair. Sinclair changed from the left-hand side of the march to the right. They waited. No movement of approach. They went forward again.

The paddings and cracklings came after them, till beyond the bushes they were in open grassland again and the stalker gave them up.

At noon they made a fire near the usual stream, and Sinclair toasted the meat. Sir John lay full length on the ground, his face hidden, saying nothing. Clair, who had been looking about her as they trekked, walked a quarter of a mile or so away across the llano, into a patch of gorse-like bushes. Presently she emerged from these, coming back with her hands held like a cup.

As she came near the fire she called, "Sir John!"

He looked up at her and smiled wryly, his face drawn with pain.

She knelt beside him. Her hands were filled with blueberries.

"Now you can lunch."

"You are a very sweet lady."

Clair looked at him gravely. "Thank you," she said, and emptied the berries into his hands.

Sinclair said, evenly: "You shouldn't eat too many of them, else it'll be as bad for you as the meat. Some horse, Miss Stranlay?"

They went on again, after Clair had fallen asleep and slept a dream-filled hour in the sun. The southward nullah-jumble drew nearer with its background of hills. And on the upper ranges of those hills was a glittering yellow colorlessness.

In mid-afternoon they came upon the giant deer.

It stood with head lowered, drinking at a pool, with dark-brown back pelt and white-dappled belly. It was quite close to them when they came through a belt of trees on it, and it was a moment before Clair realized its hugeness. Then she saw Sinclair's six feet two in outline against the thing: it had the bulk of a small elephant.

From its head uprose a twelve-foot spread of antlers, velvet-rimmed. Clair thought, "They must weigh half a ton." The brute slowly lifted its head and regarded them with vague indifferent eyes. Then it inhaled deeply, coughed and trotted away, unhurryingly, westward. They stared after it, seeing it clear the dip of a nullah in one magnificent bound, and then disappear through a pass in the hills.

And presently over those hills came the hunters.

THEY came like figures on a Grecian frieze upflung against the colors of the sunset.

First, there was the afternoon quietness but for the scuffle of the grass underfoot. The sun overhung the hills, the country lay deserted since the great deer had vanished. Clair had bent to pick a thorn from her foot and her companions also had halted, Sir John lifting his face, smelling at some unusual odor he imagined upon the wind. Then—

The first intimation was a far wild neighing and stamping. Clair straightened and looked at the other two. Their eyes were on the grass-covered hilltop perhaps a quarter of a mile away. Its rim was set with hasting dots—dots that changed, enlarged, to wild ponies in panic flight.

The drumming of their hoofs came down to the watchers. Up over the hill into full view they thundered, with flowing manes and tails, thundering against the sunset. And behind, company on company, racing into view, came the hunters.

They ran in silence, tall and naked, the sunshine glistening on golden bodies, their hair flying like the horses' manes. Golden and wonderful against the hill-crest they ran, and the staring Sinclair drew a long breath.

"Good God, they are running as fast as the horses!"

It was unbelievable. It was true. And while Sinclair and Sir John stared at now one hunter, now another, overtake his prey and spear it with whirling weapon, Clair Stranlay put her hands in her lips and whistled up through the evening that piercing blast learned long before in the streets of Battersea.

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CHAPTER SIX

THE HUNTERS

THOSE ensuing moments! Looking back on them, Clair was to wonder, with a strange tautness of her heart-strings, if they were indeed as her memory pictured them. If the fervor of the sunset behind the hunters had indeed been so intense, their approach to the three survivors of the *Magellan* so rapid.

They had come fleeting down the hill, a wash of gold, with the speed of converging clouds in a rain-storm. Abandoning the carcasses of the ponies they had swooped downward in a bright torrent, and in Clair's memory she had fast-closed her eyes at sight of their spears. She had thought:

"They will throw those spears."

But they had not. She had opened her eyes again, to find that Sinclair, upright with scowling face, had moved a little in front of her, as though to shield her from the approaching savages. Close now. Golden, with flying hair.

And then indeed in her heart had leaped that strange quiver of unreality upon which her memory insisted—or was that a later-learned thing from Sinclair's theories? For in that moment of mind-tremor it was a torrent of men from her own land—pale and pinched and padded—who bore down upon her. . . . Then that passed. She stood shaking, but seeing clearly again.

Two score or more of them, tall and golden-brown, not one of them under six feet in height. Some of them mere boys; no old men. And their faces! They were the faces of no savages of whom she had ever heard or read: broad, comely, high-cheek-boned, some with black eyes and some with blue, and one she noted with eyes that were vividly gray in his golden face. . . . Sinclair barking out, "Damn you!—Keep off!"

They took no notice whatever. Sir John Mullaghan put his arm round Clair, Sinclair fell back to her other side. The hunters at that maneuver halted, queried one another with surprised looks, and then burst into a loud peal of laughter.

Sinclair swung up his ax. "Keep off!"

For answer one of the hunters, armed with a piece of wood shaped like a boomerang, laughed in the American's face and came casually forward under the threat of the ax—so close did he come that he stood not three feet away. Clair stared up at him, saw him young, with white teeth uncovered in an enjoying grin.

Sir John's arm shot past her, gripping Sinclair's just as it was about to descend.

"Keep steady, Doctor Sinclair. We can't do anything. . . . Ah, it's too late."

For the young hunter had wheeled round at a call from his companions. Most of them had halted in attitudes of casual surprise, of cheerful indifference, but three of them, older men, were poising their spears, warningly. They called something again, and the young man, the mirth falling from his face, drew back. Unexpectedly, Sinclair dropped his ax and stood staring stupidly.

Next moment, apparently galvanized into action by nothing more than a co-operative impulse, the hunters swept in and surrounded them.

"They're friendly," said Sir John. "Keep cool, Miss Stranlay."

"I'm going to—"

A hand tugged gently at the eider-down quilt draped round her shoulders. She wheeled round clutching the thing. An impudent golden face smiled down at her. Behind her came another tug, and she turned on that. The quilt was in the hands of the young hunter who had smiled under the threat of the Neanderthal ax. He dropped it, and stretched out his hands again, his eyes lighted with amused curiosity. Clair's heart contracted.

"No—no!"

The laughter of the savages echoed up the evening of the hills. The three survivors of the *Magellan's Cloud* found themselves patted and pinched and questioned in pantomime. The young hunter, smiling, put his arms around Clair, and in a sudden panic she sank her teeth into a warm, muscular, golden arm.

The savage drew back with a cry of pain. Sinclair struggled free from the group surrounding him. He glared round and caught sight of Clair.

"Miss Stranlay? What is it?"

"Nothing." She was already repentant. "I was a fool."

She bent to reclaim the eider-down One of the hunters, like a mischievous boy, kicked it beyond her reach. Thereat Sinclair flung him nearly as far. The laughter died down. The levitated hunter picked himself up, his face black with anger. He dropped his spear, came running into the circle again, pushed his face close to Sinclair's, and shouted.

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"Don't touch him again, Sinclair!" Clair discovered Sir John Mullaghan, panting, standing by her side. The hunters had fallen silent, with eager, expectant faces. Sir John said, "God bless me!"

Sinclair, his head thrust forward as had been the angry hunter's, seemed to be replying to the savage in his own language—a torrent of consonants. At that the angry one suddenly smacked the American in the face and then leaped back lightly out of range. Doing so, the anger vanished from his face. He laughed. Thereupon all the others shouted with laughter as well, Clair's assailant being so overcome that he had to hold his sides. . . .

The *Magellan's* survivors stared astounded.

"Must be a colony of escaped lunatics," said Sir John. "I'll try to get you that quilt, Miss Stranlay. . . . What now?"

"Utso! Utso!"

The hunters, yelling, turned and ran, all but three of them. One of these seized Sinclair's wrist, another Sir John's, gesticulating the while toward the hill where the pony-battle had taken place. Clair found her right hand in the grasp of a savage whose face was vaguely familiar.

It was he of the vivid gray eyes.

He waved toward the hill, urgently. Clair, with a last desperate glance backward, pointed to the quilt. He shook his head. Next moment, in the trail of Sir John and his captor, Clair Stranlay found herself running through the evening shadows of the unknown land by the side of a golden body and a golden head which stirred a misty clamor of memories in her mind.

THERE were half a dozen ponies on the hill-brow. They were no larger than Shetlands. One of them was not quite dead. As Clair and the gray-eyed hunter arrived, a savage bent over the beast and, poising a flint ax in his hand, neatly split its skull. Half the hunters faced outward, their flint-tipped spears held ready. Strange, gray-black things with high shoulders and dragging hindquarters came out of the gleaming dimness, glared at the groupings of dead ponies and quick men, snarled disappointedly, and wabbled backward. A hunter made a feint with his spear at one of these unaccountable beasts.

Thereat, scrambling away like a calf, it guffawed hideously. Clair felt she was going mad, standing in the gloaming chill among these laughing savages and laughing beasts. She found Sinclair beside her, and clung to him for a moment, thinking, "That scowl of yours is the only sane thing in this country." She shook him.

"Who are they? What are they going to do?"

"Wish I knew—the giggling swine! Especially that clown who slapped my face—"

"Oh, never mind your face."

"I'm sorry." Stiffly.

They looked at each other. Clair began to giggle. The American still scowled with twitching face. Clair realized he was almost as hysterical as she was. Realization was somehow sobering. A hunter near them, bending over the carcass of a pony, pushed his bearded face toward them, grinning inquisitively himself, as though desirous of sharing a joke. Sir John Mullaghan struggled to their side, though indeed no one made any effort to detain him.

"Sinclair, since you know their language—"

"Oh, yes, and what language is it?" Clair also had remembered.

"I don't know. I've no memory of hearing it before. But when that circus clown came jabbering I found myself—answering him."

"But you must know what you answered."

"I don't. . . . Good God, are we to stand here while I'm put through an examination in linguistics? Stop that damned giggling, Miss Stranlay. . . . I'll ask them where they're going to take us—"

"No need," said the armaments manufacturer.

Nor was there. The hunters, half of them laden with portions of pony-carcass, began to move down the southward brow of the hill. They seemed to have no leader. The move was made in a drift of mutual convenience. A large elderly man, over-burdened, stopped beside Sinclair and motioned unmistakably. He wanted assistance.

"I'm damned if I do," said the American.

The man showed his teeth in a grin, lingered, moved on. It was almost dark. A hunter with his spear slung on his arm by a thong caught Sir John and Sinclair by the arms and urged them down the hillside.

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Looking after them, it struck Clair, absurdly, that he was doing the thing in sheer friendliness. . . . Next moment she found herself alone on the hill-brow with the beasts, now a dark mass like a moving carpet, snuffling up the hill toward her. She would have run but that a hand came over her shoulder, and she almost screamed at that. It was the gray-eyed hunter. He was evidently the rear-guard.

He smiled and motioned southward. He smiled less frequently than the others. His body smelled of red earth. Clair thought sickly, "Some caveman stuff, now, of course."

The savage left her. Fearfully, she heard the sound of a furious scuffle, the impact of blows. The hunter returned, breathing heavily, glancing over his shoulder. He caught her arm anxiously. They began to run down-hill together. Thereat a wurr of protest behind them changed into a scamper of many paws and a blood-freezing bay of laughter.

Sinclair, Sir John and the others had disappeared. Clair ran blindly in the darkness over grass and things that were probably bush-roots, for she stumbled on them. Behind, the pattering sound gained volume. Clair understood. The man beside her could run as fast as the beasts by whom they were being pursued. She was delaying him. She shook her arm free.

"Go on, you idiot, then! I can't."

For answer, still holding her hand, he swung to the right. Clair heard the scratch and scrape of the wheeling pack behind them. The hunter's hand shot up and gripped her wrist.

Next moment they trod vacancy.

Clair heard a feeble little ghost of a scream come from her own lips. She curved her body automatically and next moment struck water—water she could not see. It closed over her body like an envelope of red-hot steel. Down and down, with burning eyeballs. Something tearing at her, something holding her. . . . She found herself on the surface—the surface of a river it must be, for the current was strong—trying to swim and hampered in the effort by the grip of the hunter.

She tried to wrench her arm free, and then immediately stopped, realizing that he evidently knew in which direction to swim. Which she as certainly did not. A short distance away a snuffling clamor and bestial laughter grew fainter. Clair's knee struck soggy yielding ground. They crawled through a stretch of swamp; scrambled up an incline. Clair fell on the ground, panting. It was black as pitch. The savage was the vaguest shadow. He pulled at her shoulder impatiently, saying incomprehensible things. She raised her head.

Quite near at hand was the glow of five great fires.

SO IT seemed to Clair then, looking at the bright segmenting of the eastern night. But she was mistaken. There were five great openings into the cave, and the segmented glow had birth and being in a multitude of fires. The light grew brighter as she and the gray-eyed hunter climbed from the river.

Far in ages past that river had driven through a higher channel in the limetone bowels of the hillside; once it must have flowed eastward, an underground river. Then, in some catastrophic spate, it had burst those stygian bonds, broken free in an acre-wide vomit of great limestone boulders, and then sunk and sunk, sweeping eastward and downward, till it flowed, in rough parallel, a good hundred yards from the gaping cavern mouths that marked the river bank of the original channel.

The catastrophe had left a great cave, at some points narrow, at others wide and sweeping into a glow-softened darkness; fires burned in remote sub-caves far into the rock. . . . Clair stood in the wash of light, looking at a scene as remote from the life and times of her country as it was remote from all pictures she had ever built in imagination of the life of the savage.

There were perhaps two hundred or less human beings in that immense abandoned channel of the underground river. More than half were women and children. Some were grouped round the innumerable small fires, some lay flat and apparently asleep on skins by those fires, some stood in groups—surely in gossip!

Ten yards from Clair an old man squatted, his graying hair falling over his eyes, and, in the unchancy light of the fires, smote with a mallet at a nodule of bright flint. The staccato blows rose at regular intervals, high about the hum of the cavern.

A voice called something from the group round the nearest fire, and Clair's hunter touched her arm and she found herself walking across the hard uneven

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floor of the cave into the concentrated, astounded stare of four hundred eyes. Then (so it seemed to her) the whole cave rose en masse and precipitated itself upon her.

She said, frightenedly, so frightened that she merely said it, not screamed it, "Sinclair."

A man touched her hair, found it unbelievable, ruffled it wildly, laughed. Two women stroked her arm. Someone pinched her. A boy who might have been five years old slipped through the forest of legs and clasped Clair's knees, so that she almost fell. She clenched her fists and struck one of the women in the mouth.

At that the touching hands left her. The babble hushed. The laughing curious eyes darkened. And from somewhere Sir John Mullaghan's voice called abruptly:

"Don't do that, Miss Stranley! They don't mean any harm."

So Clair had realized. It was impossible, but it was a fact. The golden-skinned people were as friendly as they were unreticent. Clair did something then that was an inspiration—leaned forward to the woman she had hit, and who had drawn back a pace, and kissed her on her bruised mouth.

"I—I'm sorry."

Thus haltingly (and appropriately, she was afterward to think) her greeting to that world from her own. For answer the brown-haired woman put up her arms, held her head in a curious way, and kissed her in return.

("And, oh, my good God, she's a savage!")

Clair found her hand seized by the woman. She found herself being led away toward a fire burning solitary in a subcave of the great rock chamber. She found herself sitting on a badly-cured skin, with beside her the woman whom she had hit and kissed bending over the fire, toasting a long gray fish in much the same fashion as Sinclair had toasted the horse-meat. ("Like a figure from the Greek vases—a lovely figure," said her mind.) She recovered her breath and looked about her.

The American and Sir John were hasting toward her, threading the dottings of fires. Behind them followed the gray-eyed savage.

"Where did you get to, Miss Stranlay?"

Sinclair was unreasonably angry. Also, it seemed to her he was still hysterical. He kept glancing from right to left, toward the cave-mouths, the cavern-ceil-

A lark! The piping song of youth forgotten....

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ing, the groups of the golden-skinned. He waited for no answer, but, gripping his head with his hands, half-turned away. Clair thought, disturbedly, "Good gracious, what's the fuss—now we've fallen among these nice natives? They'll guide us to a town or a trading-post in a day or so." She smiled up at the two of them.

"Having a walk with a gentleman friend. There he is behind you."

The hunter came up, unsmiling. He looked from Clair to Sinclair, from Sinclair to Sir John. Then his gray eyes came back to Clair questioningly. He made a motion from her to Sinclair.

She said to Sinclair: "What?"

The American stared at her and the hunter abstractedly. He was certainly on the verge of a breakdown. He said, "Eh?" and then, to the savage, a bark of unintelligibility. The savage found it intelligible. He answered. Sinclair's hands went again to his head.

"He wants to know if you are my wife."

Clair sat up with some abruptness. "What have you told him?"

Sir John Mullaghan said very evenly: "I think Sinclair had better say yes, Miss Stranlay."

Clair found the three of them watching her—Sinclair with a strange dazed look on his face. ("Not thinking of me at all.") The woman toasting the fish looked up with wondering, friendly eyes. Clair thought, "Silly ass—go on, agree!" and so thinking found herself for some reason shaking her head at the gray-eyed hunter.

He smiled gravely, nodded and walked away. Clair, with a little catch of breath, watched him go.

To what had she committed herself?

THAT question was to return with frightened intensity a few hours later.

The fires had died down considerably. Heaped with damp grass and heavy boughs they smoldered with the smell of garden rubbish burned in an English garden. The smoke drifted out of the circle-radiance of each fire, coiled to the roof, and then, in an army of ragged banners, went north into the unexplored darkness of the ancient river-bed. Outside, a wind had risen that soughed eerily among the stars. On either side of the fires the hunters and their women slept, sometimes as many as eight or ten to a fire, sometimes only two. Clair had witnessed, and in the sleepy stirrings of the dark continued to witness, scenes of a kindly simplicity unbelievable. Savages in a cave in an unknown land!

Sir John Mullaghan had emerged once from the bizarre cavern background and the distant fire where he had been adopted.

"Comfortable, Miss Stranlay? If you want Sinclair or myself during the night, just shout. One of us will keep awake."

"Oh, don't. I'm sure we're safe enough. Who on earth *are* these people, Sir John?"

The gray-haired armaments manufacturer—surely the most grotesque figure ever seen in these surroundings!—put his hand to his head bewilderedly, much as Sinclair had done.

"I've no idea—unless I'm to accept Sinclair's new theory. Perfectly mad." He stared down at her with something like horror on his gentle face. "At least, I hope to God it's mad. . . . Don't talk about it, Miss Stranlay. We'll discuss the matter tomorrow. Have you noticed the paintings on the roof?"

"Paintings?"

"Look. Amazing things, aren't they?" He muttered to himself distractedly. "And the final proof for Sinclair's sanity. . . . Oh, they can't be," He shook himself. "Good night, Miss Stranlay."

"Good night, Sir John."

She had stared after him, troubled and puzzled. Sinclair? . . . And then her eyes had turned to the wild beauty and vigor of the painted beasts that stood and charged and fled in panic flight amid the coiling of the fire-smoke. Here was their saber-tooth, in black and gray, yonder, a red mammoth; center of the great arch of the cave chamber a nightmare monster bunched in polychrome, gigantically, for an attack. . . . Savages—and these paintings! Where were they? What country was this?

She turned now, the heavy pelt of an unknown animal beneath her, and lay on her right shoulder. She pulled another skin, long-haired and warm, up to her neck, and lay sleepless, looking down the stretch of the caves. Savages. Awful people. Only—they were neither savage nor awful.

No other words than negatives in which to state the facts.

A yard away the woman she had hit stood by the side of a broad-chested hunter with one eye and a face disfigured as though half of it had been torn away in red eclipse by the stroke of a great

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paw. He had come into the sub-cave the while the woman stolen from an Attic vase had been feeding Clair on a piece of fish and a handful of green, rush-like things, he was evidently a late arrival from the hunt, and the woman his squaw.

Clair had shuddered at sight of his face, and then saw that the hideous grimace on it was an interested smile. His squaw said something to him, sharply.

A second later Clair looked over her shoulder at the hunter and his squaw in the cave silence. They might have been Iseult and Tristan together in that unshielded embrace.

She closed her eyes—and instantly opened them again. Somewhere close to the cave-mouths a savage snarling had broken out. Clair raised herself on her elbow. She could just see through the nearest entrance, greatly pillared by nature, like an archaic temple. In the pearl starshine stalked two dim shapes, long-bodied, sinister. They seemed smooth-skinned in that light, like great hounds. Were they coming into the cave?

They growled again, and she realized the brutes were hesitating, seeking to summon up courage for just such a raid. But while she thought so a figure beside one of the far fires arose, stirred the fire near to him to a blaze, and with blazing torch came sleepily down the length of the main cave, stirring each fire. Lights yellow and red and lilac fountained with much crackle and twinkle. The beasts in the starlight vanished. Clair sank down again, watching the man with the torch.

He stopped beside her fire, stirring it as he had done the others, but more cautiously. Then he laid down the torch and crossed to where Clair lay. She closed her eyes, fast.

With that blinding of herself the silence of the night and cave fell upon her senses acutely, like a sharp pain. It was an actual, physical relationship, not of hearing alone, this silence. The crackling fires had ceased their crackling, burning now in a steady loom. Outside, the wind had died away, perhaps awaiting the moonrise—or even the dawn, for how could one know the hour? And bending over her was a savage.

She bit her lips, hearing the fervid beating of her own heart. He also would hear it, and at that thought she tried, foolishly, to ease its noise.

Should she shout for Sinclair?

She opened her eyes. She knew him then. It was the gray-eyed hunter. And it was some one else: the face of the boy who had died outside Mametz bent over her in dim scrutiny.

So, for a moment, then he turned and went, and Clair laid her head in her arms and slipped into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A SLIP IN THE TIME-SPIRALS

IT WAS next afternoon.

Clair Stranley lay sleeping in the sunlight of the bluff that fronted the caves across the river. She was high up there, and had found a place where the sear grass was less coarse than usual, and soft to lie on. She had not intended to sleep, but to lie taking mental stock of the forenoon's impressions, to brooding over the symptoms of a mysterious insanity hourly displayed by Sinclair, to watching the unending play of life in the cave-mouths opposite.

So, indeed, she had done for a little after climbing the bluff, seeing the remote golden figures of hunters or women stroll out against the limestone pillars of their habitations, seeing the moving, hasting, recumbent dots that were children sprayed out in all directions from the cave-mouths to the river.

Then sleep had come upon her, unawares, yet gently, so that even sleeping she was conscious that she slept and slept comfortably. Almost it was as though she were deeply asleep and dreaming that she slept.

So the newcomers over the grass, from the opposite way up the bluff that she had taken, did not greatly startle her. She opened clear undrowsy eyes and watched Sir John Mullaghan and the American sit down beside her, one on either side, so that all three had view of the cave-mouths opposite.

"You've been a long time," she said. "If there is time in this place."

The two men glanced at each other, swiftly, queerly, then looked away again. They said nothing. Sir John passed his hand over his gray hair in characteristic gesture. He had begun to fray badly, Sir John; he seemed to have frayed overnight.

He still had his trousers and coat, but the trousers were now shorts, the coat lacked sleeves. Sinclair—

Clair glanced at herself, and made

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hasty redrapings of her rags. "Goodness, our tailors will do a thriving trade when we do get back!"

"If we ever get back," said Sinclair.

Clair had half-expected some such remark. Yet it startled her. "So there's something behind their friendliness? Do they—do they intend to do something to us?"

"Eh?" The American looked blank for a moment. Grinned without mirth. "Oh, the cooking-pot or something like that? I imagine they've never dreamed of cannibalism. No, it's not that. We're prisoners—but only as a result of the most fantastic accident. Frankly, Miss Stranlay, I don't think there's any chance of us getting back to civilization again."

"But—we're not going to stay here always? We can start out exploring again, and we're bound to reach some place in touch with civilization. Some time."

"I doubt it."

"Why?"

The American looked round the lilac, sun-hazed hills. Below them went on the drowsy play of activity of the naked figures at the cavern entrances. Curlews were crying over that stretch of march across which Clair and the gray-eyed hunter had run the night before to escape from the giant hyenas. . . . His gaze came back to Clair face.

"Because I don't think there's such a thing as civilization in existence. I don't believe there's a restaurant or a dressmaker's shop or a doctor's surgery anywhere in the world."

Clair nodded, chewing a stalk of grass. "I know. I felt like that last night. . . . But it's only an illusion we play with, of course."

Sir John struck in quietly. "Sinclair means it seriously, Miss Stranlay."

CLAIR sat up, looking at them both. Sunstroke? But Sinclair was merely scowling, as he always did when brooding on a problem, and Sir John's face was sane enough.

"Seriously? But— We came out of—civilization five or six days ago." She indicated the frayed rags that clad her. "This sleeping suit was made in the Rue de la Paix."

Sinclair drew up his knees in front of him and clasped them. "I don't mean anything illusory, symbolic or allegorical when I say there's no such thing as civilization. I just mean it, Miss Stranlay. There's no such thing; there won't be any such thing for thousands of years."

"Perhaps you'd better detail all the evidence, as you did for me, Sinclair."

"Yes." The American turned his square, firmly modeled head. Clair, troubled though she was, had a little shock of enlightenment. Of course—that was it! The hunters had heads like that; "Let's go back to the beginning of all these happenings, Miss Stranlay—"

"Oh, let's. But why?"

"A minute. Remember what happened on board the *Magellan's Cloud?* First, there was that submarine earthquake. Then the airship's wireless failed to get any message from outside, though the set was quite undamaged. Then it grew inexplicably cold for that time of the year, and we saw islands appearing in mid-Atlantic—and quite evidently islands not newly risen from the sea. And then—the moon appearing at the full, though no moon was due for another five days."

Clair wriggled herself flat again in the sunlight. She felt a strange uneasiness. "Yes, I remember all that. And it was a different moon."

"It still is a different moon," said Sir John. "I went out of the cave early this morning and saw it. Intense volcanic activity must still be going on up there."

"More than likely. You've got all these facts, Miss Stranlay? Then, the *Magellan's Cloud* was wrecked against a mountain in a land that couldn't exist. . . . We spent a deal of argument in the last few days trying to guess what the land was. I suppose it was necessary to argue to keep sane. I was never very convinced by my own arguments. Now we've had time to think, it's plain that the airship didn't diverge sufficiently from its course—or go at such an altered speed—as to reach back either to Africa or forward to Canada or Patagonia."

"Yes. But we're somewhere."

"Obviously. But it isn't any place you ever heard of, is it? It is, in the geography of the twentieth century, an impossible place, because the airship couldn't have reached it."

Clair had begun to see. "Then—it's a new country, somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic? . . . But that must be nonsense. The sun's got at us all. . . . It's too big not to have been discovered before. It must be as big as ancient Atlantis."

There was an unnecessary silence. Sin-

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clair brooded, like Rodin's *Thinker* in rags. Sir John had turned his face to the blow of the sunlight wind. Sinclair spoke.

"Exactly. That is where I'm convinced we are—in that continent which once filled the eastern trough of the Atlantic."

CLAIR covered her ears. "Once filled it? Stop, please. . . . I feel as muzzy as a fly in honey. Once. . . . That was thousands of years ago. Atlantis. How can we be in Atlantis now?"

"Because the now is thousands of years ago."

Clair laughed and patted her ears. "There's something wrong with my hearing. You'll have to examine my ears."

It sounds very confusing, Miss Stranlay, but I think Doctor Sinclair's cumulative evidence is unimpeachable."

"Evidence of what?"

"Let me go on with the evidence first," Sinclair said quietly. "We three survived the *Magellan's* wreck, we found a plateau practically without animals, and entirely without human beings in its northernmost part. And there was a long mountain chain that must be a vent of the central fires of the earth, with thirteen unknown volcanoes on it."

"Were there thirteen? I never counted."

"Yes. Toward the end of the plateau we sheltered in a cave and were almost killed by a saber-toothed tiger. And in the cave I found the bones and skull—fresh bones and fresh skull, not fossils—of a Neanderthal man. We came down from the plateau and were chased by a mammoth. We saw an Irish elk, and, late last night, hyaenodons. All these animals—and the Neanderthal man—had long been extinct before the twentieth century. And, last of all, we are made prisoners by these people"—he waved his hand toward the caves—"whom at first I thought were merely an unknown tribe of savages."

"And aren't they?"

"I don't think so. I know what their language is and, and why I answer in it so readily. It's Basque—an elementary and elemental form of Basque. My mother was Basque. I haven't spoken the language since childhood, but last evening found myself speaking and thinking in it half unconsciously. . . . It's the loneliest language in twentieth-century Europe, as I suppose you know. No affinities to any other, just as the Basques have no apparent racial affinity to any existing group. It's been speculated that they're the pure descendants of the Cro-Magnards—you've heard of them?"

It sounded to Clair foolishly remote from their trouble of finding a way back to a knowable coast and civilization. She wrinkled her sunburned brows. "I think so. Yes—I went picnicking to the Cro-Magnon caves once and drank bad Moselle there. They were the Stone Age people who painted all those French and Spanish caves, weren't they?" Painters! Apparent enlightenment came on her. "And you think our hunters are a stray tribe of Basques?"

"No, I don't. I think they're proto-Cro-Magnards—ancestors of the French Cro-Magnards and remote ancestors to the twentieth-century Basques."

"Ancestors?"

Sir John patted her shoulder. "I think you'd have done better to tell her your theory right out, Sinclair—rather than lead up to it with evidence."

Still, miraculously, Sinclair kept his temper. "All right. Plainly, then, Miss Stranlay, and fantastic as it may sound, I believe we're not in the twentieth century at all—that through some inexplicable accident connected with that submarine earthquake the *Magellan's Cloud* fell out of the twentieth century into an Atlantic atmosphere that had never known an airship before. That was why she could get no reply to her wireless calls. This is not the twentieth century."

"What is it, then?" Clair heard her voice in the strangest, attenuated whisper.

"I don't know. But from all the evidences I should think we're somewhere in the autumn of a year between thirty and twenty thousand years before the birth of Christ."

"IT WILL always remain unreal—and oh, nonsensically impossible to believe!"

More than two hours had gone by. Clair's face was more pallid than either of the men had ever seen it, and indeed it had required something of her disbelief and horror to make them realize the thing themselves, albeit they had met that desperation of hers with irrefragable fact after fact. Now Sinclair pointed down to the mouths of the caves where the golden children played.

"Are these people unreal?"

Clair looked down. "No, they are real

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enough." She spoke in a low voice, so that they scarcely caught her words. She thought for a moment and then smiled from one to the other of them. "Thank you. It's—a devil of a thing. I don't believe I'll think about it much . . . if I can. Or at least not deliberately try to go mad. . . . All this stuff about the time-spirals and retro-cognitive memory—maths have always given me a headache. The world used always, I thought, to roll along a straight line called Time, instead of looping the loop with a thousand ghosts of itself before and after it. And none of them the ghost, and none the reality."

Sir John said: "I'm not a mathematician either, Miss Stranlay. But I take it they're all realities in the loop-spirals. And for a second—at that moment of the submarine earthquake—two of the loops touched, and the *Magellan's Cloud* was scraped off one on to the other."

"Like a fly off a pat of butter?"

"Something like that." He smiled at her from behind his grizzled beard. That was better. The Cockney was coming to her help. Clair said:

"Please. It's a September afternoon in London now. There are dead leaves in the parks, and a lot of people at the Zoo drinking tea under the leaves. And motor-buses going round Trafalgar Square and the pigeons are twittering on the roofs of St. Martin's in the Field. And there's been an accident in Hammersmith Broadway, and an ambulance has come up, and the policeman is shooting back the crowd. And Big Ben says it's twenty past three, and Jean Borrow in my flat is writing a Lido novel, and there's an unemployment procession, and there's Bond Street and shops and early-door queues in Leicester Square for an Edgar Wallace play . . . Just now.

"And it's not now. It won't happen for twenty-five thousand years. Year after year. I've been speaking just a minute. And it's a long time until sunset. And till the sunset of tomorrow. And until the winter comes here on these caves. And until the spring of next year. Year after year, till we're all three dead. And years after that, till this country's dead and no one really believes it existed. And years after that, with spring and summer and birds over the hills and belling deer, and people in love, and the babies becoming old men and women, and dying, and their descendants seeing another spring.

"An Ice Age coming—slowly, through thousands of years. And passing away through thousands more. And at the end of that time—London will still be in the future. . . . It's not now, it never can be for us, nor for any one now alive. . . . up through thousands and thousands of years we'll never see—"

Her voice had risen; it cracked on the last word. Sinclair was on his feet. He took her by the shoulder and shook her. Laughing and crying, she stared up in his eyes. Sir John half stood up also, made to interfere, refrained. Clair struggled. Her hysteria died away. Sinclair's fingers relaxed. Clair found herself staring at him resentfully, flushed, rubbing her shoulders.

"You beast!"

He was panting. "Anything you like. I tried to be an effective counter-irritant. Feel better?"

Clair shuddered. "Don't look at me, you two, for a bit."

They didn't. After a little they heard her say, "Sorry I went like that, especially after my promise."

"I felt like going that way myself last night."

"Did you?"

The American nodded. "And we're to make a compact, all three. If one of us ever feels that way again, we're to get to the other two at once. Promise?"

"Yes."

Sinclair nodded to Clair's spoken reply and Sir John's nod, and they said nothing for a little. Clair's mind felt as though it were slowly recovering from a surgical operation. *Atlantis!* She said, "And what are we going to do?"

"What is there we can do?"

This was Sinclair. Clair turned her eyes to the armaments manufacturer. He smiled at her. He looked ill, she reflected. He said gently:

"At least, we have all our lives to live—now, as in that time that is not yet, that time that is thousands of years away. And they are our lives. . . . There's the sun and the wind on the heath, brother. I wish I could remember more of Borrow." Below their eyes, the still sunshine, the life of the cave-mouths went on. "And those people among whom we've come—if we can live their life, they're livable companions, aren't they?"

"Oh!" Clair sat up again. "I knew there was something you two had left unexplained. Most important of all. You can't explain it." She turned to the American accusingly. "If these are the

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ancestors of the Cro-Magnards who are to become the ancestors of the Basque—"

"And perhaps our own ancestors. Your own remote ancestor may be one of these children playing by the river there, Miss Stranlay."

"Oh, my good God!" She was checked for a moment, and again the curtain of horror waved before her eyes. And, queerly, something came to her aid. It was memory of the gray-eyed hunter. "But that doesn't matter. Won't bear thinking about. If these people are as far back in time as you imagine—they're remoter from civilization than any savage of the twentieth century."

"Far remoter," said Sinclair. "Their weapons and implements are paleolithic flints. They seem to have no knowledge of even the elements of an agriculture. They haven't even arrived at the idea of storing water in calabashes—as I found to my discomfort last night."

"They've no tribal organization," said Sir John. "That is plain enough already. None of the ultimate divisions of power and responsibility have yet been evolved."

"But—*your* theories, Sir John, and yours, Doctor Sinclair. . . . Where is the raving Old Man with his harem of wives? And where's all the cruelty and fear and horror? They're not savages; they're clean and kindly children. Listen!"

Some jest of the caves. The shout of laughter came up to them on the bluff-head. Both the men were silent. Clair thought, 'Oh, shame to wreck your nice theories!' and said: "So it must be the twentieth century and Patagonia or some such place after all."

THE American shook his head. "Its not the twentieth century: our data is stable enough. It's just that all the history books and all the anthropological theories of the twentieth century tell the most foolish lies ever invented. It's just that Sir John Mullaghan and I and thousands more have been victims of the shoddiest scientific lie ever imposed on human credulity. . . . These proto-Cro-Magnards, these earliest true men on earth—absolutely without culture and apparently absolutely without superstitious fears, cruelties, or class-divisions. It means that Rousseau was right (or will be right? How is one to think of it?) and the twentieth-century evolutionists all wrong."

Clair said steadily: "These—like our ancestors; perhaps some of them our own ancestors. . . ." For a moment it seemed to her that her two companions were ghouls squatting beside her in the sunlight. "And I knew it—women always knew it! But you two and the thousands of others who lead the world swore that men were natural murderers: you killed five million in France to prove your theories. All through history you've been doing it. . . . The boy who died on the wire outside Mametz—he was one of those hunters, I saw his own face last night. And you and the world told him he was a murderous beast by nature and ancestry!"

She was aware of the armaments manufacturer looking at her, doubt and gray horror in his face. "Perhaps this is only a stray tribe of primitives unlike all others."

"No." Sinclair spoke. Abruptly, as with an effort. "They are no stray tribe. You are right, Miss Stranlay. You are woman, for that matter, or fifty tortured centuries accusing us. . . . And we've no defense. We never tried to find out the real facts of human nature. . . . By God, but some did! Some were trying. I've just remembered. There was a new school of thought in the world out of which we came. The Diffusionist. And we thought them fantastic dreamers!"

"What did they dream?"

"Why, that primitive man was no monster, that it was the early civilizations and their offshoots that bedeviled him. If a Diffusionist were here at the moment he would say that these are men as nature intended them to be. So they will continue for thousands of years till, by an accident in the Nile Valley, agriculture and its attendant religious rites will be evolved. And from that accident in 4000 B. C. will rise, transforming the world, the castes and gods, the warrior and slave, the cruelties and cannibalisms, Sir John Mullaghan's armaments, the war that murdered your fiancé, Miss Stranlay, and my League of Militant Pacifists."

They stared at Clair uncomfortably in the bright sunhine. A party of hunters came over the eastward hills—golden figures against a golden background. They were singing, these dawn-men—godless and fearless and hateless and glorious, Sinclair thought, they who should have slouched through the sunlight obsessed and hideous animals! . . . Sir John was grayly conscious of Clair's silent figure.

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"But I still don't understand. If this is the world of twenty-five thousand B. C., as we've calculated, what is its population? Are there other men? Is there a Europe? And that Neanderthal skull—it didn't belong to a species of man like one of these hunters, surely?"

The American made an abrupt, half-despairing gesture.

"How can we know—now—since all our other beliefs about these times go *phut?* Something like this, I imagine: Atlantis here is a great waste of land, the youngest and most unstable of the continents. It must stretch out at points almost across to the Antilles and America. And wandering through it are possibly a few scarce family groups like our hunters. Possibly—but our hunters may be the only true men as yet in existence.

"They must have been wandering this land for thousands of years. In the east there, toward Europe and in Europe itself, there are Neanderthal men—unhuman, a primitive experiment by Nature in the making of man. They also must be few enough in number, though their species probably spreads far into Asia and Africa.

"And somewhere in Central and Southeastern Asia at this moment may be other family groups of true men, not so very different from these golden cavemen of ours, slowly wandering westward. . . . There is an Ice Age coming, a few thousand years hence, and at the end of it the Neanderthalers will die out and these hunters, or rather their descendants, reach Europe and spread over it, intermarry with those remote kinsmen of theirs from Asia. . . . Something like that."

He jumped to his feet. "Oh, by God, if one could only tell them—those hunters of ours!"

"Tell them what?" asked Sir John.

"History—the world that is to be. Remember that kindly chap that took you and me prisoners—we thought we were prisoners and we weren't at all. He's never heard the words for war or prison. Or that hunter who brought Miss Stranlay to the caves. . . . If they knew what their children there in the sunlight are going to inherit—thousands of years away!

"All the bloody butcheries of the battlefields, the tortures and mutilatings of the cities still unbuilt, the blood-sacrifices of the Aztec altars, those maimed devils who die in the coal mines of Europe. . . ." He looked down at Clair. "You're a novelist, Miss Stranlay. You were born in the slums—thirty thousand years in the future. Do you remember it? Think that it still has to happen—for these."

Clair said, in a pale, quiet voice: "Will you two leave me alone? Oh, I won't go mad again."

"Don't stay too late. We'll watch for you from the cave."

"All right, Sir John."

She heard the *scuff-scuff* of their receding footsteps. She was alone. A lapwing came wheeling over the hill-brow and passed toward the marshes. Drowsiness had settled on the caves. Clair Stranlay laid her head on her arms and began to weep—to weep and weep as she had never before done in her life.

FOR a little her thoughts were in a static confusion. Then they combered into a wild clamor—an affrighted clamor, though the fear was of a different order from that which had horrified her into hysteria in the presence of Sinclair and Sir John.

"But what am I to do?" she thought. "Oh, my good God, what am I to do? If we're here forever—but I can't! I may live to be a hundred—days and days and months and years—among horse-flesh and fires. No books. Never read a lovely piece of prose again. Never have the fun of correcting my own proofs. Or lying on a soft clean bed. Or smoking cigarettes. Never talk to the people who like my kind of jokes, or twist an argument; or be clever and bright. Or wear pretty clothes and have men admire me. And be safe—safe and secure. . . . I can't do it."

The grass rustled under her as she lay and wept, terrified. She closed her eyes, tightly, to make sure that this country and the American's talk were all part of a dream. Ever so tightly. In a moment, when she opened them, she'd know. It couldn't be, it couldn't be. . . . She opened her eyes on the afternoon of the pale Atlantean hills.

As she looked across them with misted eyes, far and remote, and heard by her for the first time since their coming to the caves, there rose and belled and quivered in the air the sound that had startled the mammoth miles away by the side of the great oak. It rose and fell, rose again, died on a long strange note, that mysterious lowing. Wonderful thing. Breath-taking thing to hear.

If only she had a note-book and pencil!

Both of them thousands of years away.

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"Let's think calmly, then. If this were only a novel—one of the kind you've wanted to write for a holiday. Think that this isn't yourself; only your heroine. It's she who's lying on a hill above a lost Atlantis cave, watching the children of the dawnmen playing by a lost river. . . . And you're comfortable in your Kensington study, planning out the synopsis. What's she going to do next? How's she going to live? She *must* live—you'd never be mean enough to kill her off. But *how?*"

It was late in the afternoon now—those afternoons that seemed to contract so steadily with the wearing of the week. She saw the smoke far up the opposite hillside—from some high vent that aerated the caves—thicken from pale blue to violet black. They were building up the fires. Soon the main body of the hunters, that had left at dawn, would return. The individual hunters must long ago have returned. Sinclair and Sir John waiting for her. Hungry. Hungry herself.

She stood up. The wind had turned cooler. She shivered. Her ragged jacket flapped, and the pajamas-trousers blew against her legs.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FOR THE DARK DAYS

THAT night the rain set in, blowing gustily into the mouths of the caves, so that the flames of the fires danced and spat and flickered, and long serpent-shapes of smoke wound and whorled everywhere. Amid them blew sharp piercing shafts of wind, and Clair began to realize something of the life of those people in the winter months.

She lay wakeful beside her fire, and Sinclair, who could not sleep either, came over to her while the beating gusts shook the limestone hills and moaned far away in the subterranean depths of the ancient river-bed.

"Shocking night."

Clair stirred the fire gently with a bough, and nodded to him. He stood looking into the fire himself.

Clair wound the odorous bearskin more closely round herself.

"Let me feel your pulse," he said.

He did. It seemed quite normal. She startled him with a question. "Do you think we'll pull through the winter months—especially Sir John?"

"What?"

"Oh, you know. *You* will, I think. You have physique for it, and most of the other advantages. I may—through the accident that winter-bathing was my hobby—though goodness knows I feel like a white snail among all these golden people."

"You looked lovely enough."

He said this impersonally. Clair nodded. "I know I'm not unsightly. But mentally—coddled and cowardly. Best-selling never trained me for a winter in Atlantis."

He was silent. He bent down to place a burning twig more evenly. The wind whoomed, blowing his hair and beard, as Clair saw looking up at him from the shelter of her bearskin. In shadow and in flickering light the Cro-Magnards slept disregarding rain and squall—all, except three very young babies who wailed softly in the far corner of the cave.

These apart, even the very youngest slept soundly. Outside, against the cave-mouths, the wavering curtains of rain. . . . Atlantis! Lost in Atlantis and prehistory! Clair, forgetting the silent Sinclair, leaned on an elbow, gazing round at the sleeping hunters with golden easy bodies. And for some strange, fantastic reason she thought of lines in Tennyson:

> "Ah, such a sleep they sleep.
> The men I loved!—"

Those cavemen, the men of the dawn! And suddenly it was to her as though they lay dead, they and their women and children, and over them indeed came stalking those ghoulish shapes with which the world remote in the future was to identify them—great beasts, slime-dripping, with fetid jaws and rheumy eyes, tearing at the throats of these dead men of the dawn, mangling and destroying and befouling the human likeness from the lovely limbs and faces. . . . She started, hitting her head against the sandy floor, Sinclair had turned his head, sharply, looking at her.

"You're sleepy now. Good night."

"Oh—I was dreaming awake. Good night—it's ridiculous to say Doctor Sinclair. What is your name?"

"Keith."

"Good night, Keith."

"Good night, Clair."

Alone again, she lay on the verge of sleep and thought: "Those babies. Poor things. Awful for them."

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Two of them had been born that afternoon. Both had been dead before sunset. Their bodies had been carried along the river bank to the edge of the marsh and abandoned there, Sinclair had said.

"Awful. How it's raining! Drumming like a London roof under rain, almost. London roofs—but you mustn't think of them. Nor all your London days. Over, all days, very soon, I suppose."

She grew wakeful again at that thought. Sinclair had gone without answering her question. Over: all the bright burnished hours, the days of summers and autumns, the good things to eat, the ease and pleasantness. . . . To come to an end and a blinding in darkness at last, somewhere, in some dark cave, without medical attention or understanding. And some one, unless Sinclair or Sir John was still alive, would carry her body outside the range of the caves; and leave it for a beast to devour.

She looked, and so for long until the fires died continued to look, into a night that was a pit of terror.

BUT that next dawn—

She awoke luxuriously, in the embrace of a strange, secret exaltation. Why? Something awaiting her? She put aside the fur and got up and shivered in the dawn chill, and saw then that it was but barely the dawn.

No one stirred. Far at the farthest fire the watcher of the fires was smoothing a stick with a flint. He heard her, lightly though she walked, and looked round, and flung back his hair from his face, and smiled. A boy. She smiled herself and warmed herself by the fire of another household, scraping away ash and refuse and replenishing the cone-shaped structure with boughs from a pile stacked near.

Then she went to the nearest mouth of the cavern, and at her appearance the sun that had been hesitating behind the hills came over them, and she stood and shivered with pleasure in its first beams. The guard hunter came to her side; said something unintelligible; motioned toward the river. A lion and a lioness, gray beasts rather than tawny in that light, were standing watching them, not twenty yards away.

The hunter gestured with the half-smoothed bough in his hand. Promptly the lion disappeared through the soft wet grass. The lioness growled and stalked after him despondently.

The hunter laughed.

The caves began to stir. The women awoke and fed their babies. The men arose and drifted about and were scolded, and grinned, and crowded the cave-mouths as though in casual gossip. Clair saw Sir John Mullaghan rising, with some appearance of chilled joints, from a heap of boughs. A Cro-Magnard helped him up.

A frizzling smell began to pervade the cavern. Breakfast. It was deer-flesh, cooked in the same monotonous way as always. Frying-pans, pots and pantries were as unknown as gods, chancels and torture-chambers. Afterward the Cro-Magnards would wander down to the river in twos and threes, and drink.

The men went away in the early morning, after drinking at the river and indulging in some horseplay when three of them were thrown into the water, and the others—apparently in a mood of self-retaliation—flung themselves in on top. Watching them, Clair said to Sir John, "But I thought swimming was a very artificial acquirement of human beings."

"Perhaps this family group has wandered from the shore of some inland sea in Atlantis. They're certainly very cleanly, most of them, though it's plain it's not because of any code. They are because they enjoy it."

"Where's Keith Sinclair?"

Sir John smiled. "He's going out with the hunters."

Clair saw him approaching then. It was apparently for him that the watcher of the fires had been smoothing the bough through the night. He carried that bough now, straightened, and with a carefully knapped sliver of flint wedged and bound in it. Clair reached out her hand and took the thing and examined it, and some of the women came and looked at the three of them smilingly. One, a girl, giggled. And Clair thought:

"I hope I'm not examining it too intently. I should be as casual as he was."

The American nodded as he handed it back. There was a flush on his dour face, a sparkle in his eyes. "I suspect I'll be the worst kind of amateur. At the stalking as well as the running—in spite of my atavistic legs."

"Atavistic?"

"Hadn't you noted it? I'm fairly Cro-Magnard altogether in physiognomy. And the twentieth century seems to have guessed correctly from study of the fossil

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remains of these people found in the French caves that their long shin bones were developed by racing game on foot. . . . By the by, this is a feast day."

"Feast?" Sir John, a grotesque figure in his rags, had sat down. He smiled at them, grayly. "I'm sorry, Miss Stranlay. I'm still a trifle upset internally. . . . Did you say a feast, Sinclair?"

"Yes."

"But from what you were telling me of the Diffusionist theory of history last night I understood that ritual feasts came only with civilization?"

"There seem to be two exceptions. Perhaps they're memories of the old pre-human mating seasons. In spring and autumn they occur, as far as I can gather from the old flint-knapper, Aitz-kore; and the autumn one comes after the first night of rain."

"What's it for?" Clair asked.

"It's the time, I understand, when the men and women choose their mates for the winter—or those already mated exchange. Sir John and I will take you out for a walk when it comes off, if you like."

"No. If we're here for the remainder of our lives that would be too suburban. . . ." She suddenly gripped his arm. "There's my hunter."

No other. Clair had not seen him all the day before. He went and sat down by a fire and ate some scraps of venison surviving the breakfast. A baby came and fell over his feet. He righted it absorbedly and put it aside. The baby procured a bone and sucked it.

"Been out on a lone trek, I should think," said the American. "They often do that, the young and unmarried, according to Aitz-kore. Wander off sometimes and don't come back. Hello, they're waiting for me!"

"Good hunting!"

"Thanks." He called over his shoulder. "Don't stray far from the caves, either of you."

Scouts had already gone. Others straggled westward by the marsh, going casually, for there was no game near at hand. The American pacifist joined a golden-skinned group and companioned them out of sight, his white skin very conspicuous. Standing in the sunlight of the cave mouth, Clair looked after him, stretched luxuriously and sighed deeply. Sir John looked up inquiringly.

"Nothing, Sir John, except—did you ever sleep on Box Hill on a Sunday afternoon?"

He shook his head, his face gentle still, if a little twisted. She did not notice. She was twenty millennia away.

"Heat and stickiness and some one playing a melodeon, and poor life-starved louts prowling among the bushes. Goodness, the stickiness and the taste in one's mouth! When we might have been like this. . . . Box Hill!"

Sir John also had fallen into a dream. Box Hill! His company; his constituency; that journey to America. . . . Here in the sunshine of Atlantis one began to doubt them. Had they ever been? . . . He found he had been thinking aloud. He found Clair's hand on his shoulder. Her lovely face was lighted but dreamy still.

"Perhaps they were, but—*need they ever be?* Perhaps men dreamed the wrong dream. We are such stuff of dreams. . . . Perhaps it was only a nightmare astray on Sinclair's time-spirals out of which we came. . . . It feels so here this morning. As though all the world could begin again—"

Begin again? Sir John put his head in his hands. Begin again! Who indeed knew what was possible in this fantastic adventure?—if only the pain could go and he could see it and understand it more clearly. . . . Begin again? Poets had dreamed it, and they had changed the world with other dreams. . . . Shelley, of course! Long ago since he had read Shelley:

"The world's great age begins anew,
The golden years return,
The earth doth like a snake renew
Her winter skin outworn:
Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam
Like wrecks of a dissolving dream."

IT WAS mid-afternoon.

The caves had emptied their entire population on to the plateau east of the river bank. They had trooped out in little groups, men and women separately for once. A couple of jackals, roused from a bed of reeds, had distracted somewhat the attention of the processions, the entire tribe engaging in an idiot chase of the beasts, pelting them with stones, shouting and hallooing, until long after the snarling brutes were out of sight.

Clair, laughing and panting, a Greek among Polynesians, rejoined Sir John and Sinclair, gray-haired the one, black the other, and now with her red-tipped mop coming between them.

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"Feels as though I were going to the world's first picnic!"

Beyond the nullahs was a flattish stretch of grass, short-cropped perhaps in the hour-passing of some enormous herd. Right of it lay the river. Over the westward hills beyond the marsh hung the sun, high up. The gray-gold land drowsed. And the Cro-Magnards' laughter went up a little wind.

The women and children grouped themselves, sitting or standing or lying, round the eastward verge of the sward. The men held over to the other side and also lay or sat. A silence fell. The three survivors of the *Magellan's Cloud* looked at one another in some doubt; finally reached a spot that seemed neutral, neither for men nor women. They lay down, resting on their elbows. The silence went on.

Suddenly a blackbird began to pipe in a thicket near at hand, breaking the tension for the three aliens at least.

The sound had stirred the Cro-Magnards also. A man rose slowly from the midst of the male embankment, and slowly walked across toward the gathering of women. The sun glided over gray-black hair.

"It's the old flint-knapper, Aitz-kore," whispered the American interestedly.

So it was. Still the silence went on as he passed over the grass. The rustle of his passage if not his footfalls could be heard. He arrived at the end of the women's line, and slowly passed up the ranks of the women, scanning each face. They looked him in the eye. One or two of the younger ones giggled. But for the most they kept the initial silence. Sir John whispered:

"His wife is there in the middle."

Aitz-kore neared her. Clair found herself holding her breath. The flint-knapper passed the woman without a change of countenance. Something seemed to contract in Clair's throat.

Aitz-kore reached the end of the line, paused, shrugged, turned back, walked slowly over the track he had already made in the grass, his face like his name, a pointed hatchet, old and sharp. He halted in front of the woman who had been his wife. She had sat with head down-bent, but she raised it now. Clair was too far off to see her face, but she knew she was weeping. The flint-knapper held out his hand. The woman took it and rose up. A yell of delight rose from hunters and women alike.

"He's selected her again from all the women of the tribe," Sinclair explained.

The two of them walked down to the southward end of the plateau, turned leftward, in the opposite direction from the caves, and were out of sight before Clair glanced for them again. She had been intent on the second venture.

Again a man had crossed the open space, walked the line and made selection of a woman—a young woman, and comely even among the comely. But he had less luck than Aitz-kore. The woman shook her head. Thereat the hunter, after a moment's hesitation, walked back to the place from which he had come.

It was now the woman's turn. She rose. Leisurely she crossed to the seated rows of men, hesitated not an instant, but held out her hand. Instantly a young man—a mere boy—sprang to his feet and took her hand. Again the strange cheer went up from the gathering. Clair's eyes sparkled.

The woman and boy broke into an easy, long-legged trot, southward, across the sward, and then turning east and racing for the hills. Another woman rose up and crossed toward the men's side, stopping midway to fling back a cloud of russet hair from a flushed, high-cheekboned face.

"She has a lovely figure," said Clair.

"They all have," said Sinclair.

And it was true. Neither the steatopygia of the savage nor the pendulous paunch of corset-wearing civilization were here. They mated as they chose, those golden women, they bore children, many and quickly, unless they tired of mating; they died in great numbers in childbirth, they and their children. And they lived free from the moment they were born till the moment when that early death might overtake them.

Golden children in the dawn of time, they paired in the afternoon sunshine and in pairs melted away into the east. Clair, warm and comfortable, found herself nodding drowsily. Every now and then, however, she would start to half-wakefulness as another shout went up, another nuptial couple wheeled out of the gathering. Suddenly, in a long quietness, she started fully awake.

"Keep cool, Miss Stranley."

"By God. . . . Aerte."

Clair raised her head. An intenser silence than ever before had fallen on the gathering. Few of the Cro-Magnards were sitting now. All stood to look. And

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the reason was the gray-eyed hunter, Aerte.

He walked from the far end of the men's line. His head was a little downbent, as though in deep thought. Under his left arm was his spear. Disregarding the waiting line of women he came, straight toward where the three survivors of the airship's wreck lay.

Clair thought, breathlessly: "Cooler, now. Must get back to the caves soon. Sir John—wonder if he's feeling better? . . . Defense. Not thinking. Taking no heed." But in some fashion she felt as though she had just finished running an exhausting race. Sinclair, his eyes on the hunter, said:

"Just shake your head, Clair. There's no compulsion among these people."

But Clair's head he saw was as downbent as the hunter's own. She saw the nearing feet in the grass, but nothing more. And then he was close; had halted. She raised her head.

They looked at each other for a long time. She heard the American say something; something quite incomprehensible because of that drumming noise in her ears. She was looking up, even in the still sunshine, not into the face of Aerte alone. Her heart was wrung with a sudden wild pain of recognition, and then that passed, leaving a tingling as of blood, long congealed, that flowed again. . . . A gentle voice came nearer and nearer out of the silence. Sir John's.

"He'll go away. It's just that he doesn't realize that you are different."

"I'm glad."

They saw her swing to her feet. She stood beside the hunter.

"Miss Stranlay!"

There was urgency and appeal in the simultaneous cry. Clair looked back at them, shook her head. They had grown the mistiest of images.

And then she put her hand in the hand of the hunter, Aerte, felt that hand close on hers, felt herself drawn forward, heard a groan from Sir John Mullaghan as she and the hunter moved away in the direction of the other promised mates.

She closed her eyes, and when next she opened them found before her the eastern hills.

RAIN came on again that night. Winter was not far off from Atlantis. Distant in the north the volcanoes smoked, and sometimes, in the lifting clouds of rain, could be glimpsed as the beating of damp beacons remote in the mirk. Clair, lying sleepless, saw them, pregnant, dark blossoms high up in the sky. Remote there was the plateau crossed by herself and Sinclair and Sir John only three days ago. Fantastic journey. Fantastic climax to it, this. . . . The hunter stirred, dreamlessly, dark and golden, and she peered at him, then at the passing curtains of rain.

A lover—a chosen husband—for the dark days! A lover dead and dust twenty-five thousand years before she had been born, sleeping there among the other hunters. What dream was this that had led her feet from a Kensington flat to that running across the hills from the mating-place to the dawn-men?

They had run beyond the sight and sound of that mating-place, and then, at the over-quickening of Clair's breathing, the hunter had slowed down and looked at her inquiringly. They were in a treeless stretch of long grass, the river deserting them and holding southward.

Across the grass, a mile or more away, two great hairy beasts shoggled through the afternoon, one after the other. Woolly rhinoceroi. Clair, panting, had brought her eyes back to Aerte.

They had smiled together. Clair had thought: "And where from here?"

He had answered that by taking her hand again and breaking again into the trot that was probably his customary pace. The trees drew nearer. Clair saw that they were beeches, with great open spaces between. The rhinoceroi had disappeared. Clair, breathing desperately, lay down. Aerte halted, laughed, gestured, his black hair falling over his face. Then he laid the spear down beside her and vanished among the beeches.

When she had recovered her breath

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she heard the sound of him returning, and saw what he carried. It was a great watermelon. She sat up, looking at him lightedly. His grave eyes laughed down at her.

She had reached up and kissed the Cro-Magnard's lips, his promised mate. . . .

Where would the night find them and their companions? Back in the caves?

Aerte had shaken his head when they stood on their feet again and she gestured that question. He picked up his spear. On the young bearded face close to hers she saw, with a quiver of wonder, a mist of perspiration. He looked down at her, grave again, though with shining eyes. Haunting face. . . .

He said: "Over the hills."

They had perhaps half a score of words between them, as they went across the sunset land.

At length they drew nearer to the hills —great redstone masses unusual enough in the Atlantean scene. Gorse in thickets climbed their flanks. Birds rose whirring at their approach. Plover. It grew cold. Suddenly their shadows began to race hillward.

"Do hope you've some place in mind where we can shelter."

Strange jargon in that sunset land! The English speech, so fine and splendid and flexible an implement, fashioned from the blood and travail of generations of Aryans yet unborn. Thousands of years yet before from Oxus bank dim tribesmen would drift across the Urals, and the first English word issue from barbarous lips. . . . She became aware that they were threading in single file a long cleft in the hills. Golden flanked as the hills, Aerte led the way.

Beyond the winding cleft, she realized they had swung northeastward. Across the savanna waste, remote, towered the plateau where she had journeyed from the wreck of *Magellan's Cloud*. A week ago!

There lay the lake in the dying light. Perhaps if they listened they would hear that lowing again. She had caught the hunter's arm then and stayed him, listening. But from the dimming plateau-world and its foreground had come no sound other than a faint rustle, as though it were a painted screen rustling in the wind.

They climbed. The lake receded, blurred, vanished. And at length, on a bush-strewn ledge, Aerte had drawn aside a bush and shown their shelter for the night. She understood then the reason for his disappearance the day before. Some twelve to fourteen feet deep, the shelter, though not more than four feet high.

Round the walls were things that looked to Clair like paintings, but the light went then and she could make nothing of them. The hunter motioned her inside. He was standing against the sunset. It was very still. She heard the beating of his heart and thought that were the light clearer she might verily see that beating. . . . Almost a shadow, some Titan threatener of the ancient gods, against the coming threat of darkness. His black hair blew softly in the wind. And Clair remembered more Tennyson:

"Man, her last dream who seemed so fair,
Such splendid promise in his eyes—"

Man. Aerte. One and the same, here in the night that was the morning of the world. And if she closed her eyes for a moment she would see him hanging in the barb-wire entanglements of Mametz trench, hear again, that moan that shuddered still, undying, unceasing, in a night twenty-five thousand years away: "Clair! Oh! Clair! . . ."

She had called him in then startledly, her face quivering, and he had come, and ceased to have any symbolical significance whatever, and had been merely the strange dark hunter, and again, of course, the promised mate.

As they sat again in the twilight, later, her arm was round the bare shoulder of the hunter. She told him in a slow murmur of words of which she had no understanding, and he had understood and brought from the back of the cavelet cooked fish, several of them, wrapped in great leaves. She sat and ate with great appetite, wiping her fingers in the grass, and reflecting on the amount of germs she must be eating. . . . Her world had been haunted by the wriggly shapes of germs, even as the world of the Middle Ages by devils.

She had said of the hunter and the others, that they were children, and so they were. She was twenty thousand years older than he—than these others around them. Behind her marched the bloody ghosts of all history; behind the ancestry of this golden boy beside her was nothing but long millennia of vivid harmless lives, reaching back to the time when men were not yet men. . . .

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They were staring at the golden image of mankind's youth

CHAPTER NINE

SIR JOHN: HIS PROPHECY

IT DID not rain the next day, nor the next. Instead, they burned with the vivid radiance of a Mediterranean summer; they burned their sights and sounds into the soul of Clair Stranlay. Each evening found her and the others back in the painted cavelet—and aurochs stood in challenging regard of a chromered lion in that cave, and Aerte was the artist—but nights and evenings were only so many jade beads on the golden garments of the suntime hours.

Clair in those hours discovered the wonder of the earth itself—as though it were a thing apart from her, yet no more apart than grass and trees and that aurochs' calling and the cry of a wounded deer. She went out into mornings that changed from dull gray to amethystine clarity and a hold-your-breath silence, from that to a nameless stir and scurry and beat that brought the sun orange and tremendous above the Atlantean hills, pringling with warmth on chilled back and face, though one's feet, running in the grass, were chilled still. These, and the smell of the smoke from the fire kindled in the bright weather and drifting blue wavelets across the face of the hunter. Noon, and lying in sunlight in a sunlight dream, drinking in that sun, and the smell of the crushed grass under her head.

Crickets chorusing: it was a land of crickets. Sunset and the hasting homeward of bird and sun and cloud and themselves. These the background for hours such as neither she nor any of her century had ever lived.

But the second nightfall a troubled brooding look came into the grave eyes of Aerte. He turned at the mouth of their shelter and pointed toward the plateau that with each falling of dust kindled its volcano-torches to watchful brightness. He gestured ineffectively. He

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and Clair looked at each other dumbly in the dusk. Something—

And next morning they went out from the painted cavelet of sixty hours' residence, and Clair never saw it again. For that morning the band went west before the sun, slowly, in no great hurry, yet with intention.

Once they stopped to bathe in a lagoon from which they were evicted by the splashings and blowing of a great beast such as Clair had never seen before—a thing with a body like an unfortunate bee-vat, four stumpy legs, a hide that seemed to suffer from mildew and a head that was a bewildering confusion of teeth, tusks, horns and bosses. It splashed and paused and pawed, watching the bathers, and Clair felt the hunter tug at her hair. She turned, treading water, and followed him. Nor any too soon, for the multihorned animal at that moment charged them from the bank with the speed of an express train and something of its whining uproar.

Clair it missed by inches, but they were as good as so many miles, for the beast's speed carried it into deep water where it floundered and squawked piercingly, evidently unable to swim. Its musk odor lay like a scum upon the water. Eying it, the hunter hefted his spear thoughtfully, and then shook a regretful head as it gained a sand-bank and stood blowing and dripping there. Bogged, he would evidently have considered it a titbit.

"I'd sooner eat a goods-wagon," Clair told him.

She told him many a thing as unintelligible. She found it a saving necessity to keep herself in remembrance that a week before she had been Clair Stranlay, not a wanderer with a savage through a land lost in the deeps of time. A savage! At that her laughter went up to the soaring circus of carrion birds gathered in haste to watch the shoreward meanderings of the ill-tempered monster. The hunter's contralto laugh joined in, shortfully, his gray eyes upon Clair, and lighting as they were wont to do.

And suddenly, in the aurulent loveliness of the day. Clair felt sick with a strange queer dread of what the future might bring.

SINCLAIR saw their home-coming in the late afternoon of that third day. Sitting a little beyond and above the cave-mouths, peeling a long wand and binding either end of that wand with deer-gut, he saw them come. He paused at work. He swore, with the ancient outward mechanism of emotion that the days were indeed wearing to meaninglessness.

Clair Stranlay!

(Ten days before: *Magellan's Cloud;* passengers' gallery; a languid loveliness in an expensive frock, with painted lips and ironic, inquiring gaze. . . .)

"Safe, anyhow," he thought.

Safe they seemed. They came over the hills, the hunter pony-laden, Clair carrying the spear. In the blaze of the sun setting she saw the American and waved the old Stone Age spear. He waved in reply and then returned to work on the peeled wand. He was almost alone at the cave-mouths, for of the couples who had taken to the hills, Clair and Aerte were the last.

They splashed through the river, stopping midway, the hunter to lave himself from head to foot, for he was very warm, having killed the pony on the run only a few minutes before. Sinclair descended from his ledge.

"Hello, Keith!"

"Hello, Clair."

She found his stare impossible to meet. A slow wave of color ebbed into her cheeks. She thought: "I *will* look at him," and look at him she did, resolutely, then. His gaze passed over her shoulder. She leaned on the spear, pleasantly tired and looked round for Aerte.

He also stood looking at Sinclair. And then a queer thing happened. A shadow came on his face; he seemed to flicker before Clair's eyes, to vanish. . . . Moved, of course. Slipped into the caves. . . . "Good God!"

Clair said, "Why?"

"Your hunter. Where is he?" The American looked round about him in some puzzlement. "Sight of him with you makes me realize more than anything else the damnable impossibility of it all. Where did you go?"

She told him something of the two days. A boy came wandering out of the caves, saw her, gave a hail of welcome that brought out Zumarr and others. She stood in the midst of a laughing friendly throng, unalien to them, as Sinclair realized, as she had never been to her own century. Clair Stranlay, the best-selling novelist, had shrugged aside the dream of civilization and come home to the welcome and understandability of an Atlantean cave!

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Darkness was very near. Now the radiance from the cave fires stole out across sedge and savanna in pursuit of the hasting daylight.

Returned, the hunters were singing in unison, and Sinclair heard their singing with voices from his childhood:

"I followed my brother into the sun,
In the sunrise-time.
And we crept beyond the place of the bear
Sleeping and sad and a foolish bear
In the sunrise-time,
To the ridge where the wild horses run!
Running and pawing and making their play
In the sunrise-time,
And we lay and awaited, still as a deer
In a thicket at bay:
Till the stallion came near with the mares
Of his choice
In the sunrise-time,
And my brother slew with a blow of his spear
The stallion red like the sun himself
In the sunrise-time.
But I, I followed the mare that was gray
Swiftly out of the place of the ridge
Swiftly past the lair of the bear,
The sleeping and sad and foolish bear,
In the sunrise-time
And we ran with the sun
Swift and swift and the mare was mine
And I slew the mare with a blow of my spear
And I drank its blood and I warmed my hands
In the blood of the mare
In the sunrise-time.

"WHAT are they singing?" he heard an English voice.

He found Clair alone with him again. The others had drifted back to the caves to join in that song.

A chill wind came down the Atlantean river.

"Singing? I suppose it is a song. About killing a horse."

"Filthy business. I helped Aerte to kill one."

"You helped at the same business before you met him. Remember that little deer up on the plateau?"

Clair remembered. "And we thought we were in West Africa. Instead—"

The instead was beyond speech. Sinclair looked acros the river. He said, abruptly:

"Listen, Miss Stranlay, we're here by such kind of accident as probably never happened before. Twenty-five thousand years or more before the birth of Christ. It means hardly anything saying those words; but they have meaning.

"We're here, members of a tribal group that, for all we know, are the only human beings yet on earth. Certainly it's ancestral of the Cro-Magnards and half the modern population of Europe. And there is no Europe yet, there is no modern population." He spoke very slowly and casually.

"This is the Golden Age of the human race. I don't know how long it will be before the Fourth Glacial time. Perhaps three thousand years. But it's coming, and by then the descendants of these people—the descendants of your children—will have drifted across to the fringes of Europe. Through thousands and thousands of years they'll drift with all the chances of famine and starvation and mauling and killing by beasts that are Nature's chances, and may be shared by your children and their children, and endured because of the things between that will be like the happiness in the lives of these present hunters—like those two days you've spent with the hunter Aerte. But this life does not last for ever.

"In the Nile Valley, four thousand years

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before the birth of Christ, an accident is to transform the human race and human nature. Do you know that there will be descendants of yours whom they'll stretch out on sacrificial altars—babies of yours—and rip their hearts out of their chests? Do you know your descendants will be tortured in dungeons, massacred in captured cities, devoured at cannibal banquets?

"In Tyre they'll burn alive those children of yours inside the iron belly of Baal, Rome will crucify them in scores along the Appian Way. They'll chop off their hands in hundreds when Vercingetorix surrenders to Cæsar. Can't you hear mounting down through the years the cry of agony from those children of yours that may so easily be? I can. I can close my eyes and hear the dripping of their blood."

So could Clair. "I never thought of that. Oh . . . horrible and terrible!" She covered her face. "Why did you tell me? Perhaps—*perhaps there were babies of mine who died on the barb-wire there in France, who are starving in the London streets now, drowned in some awful Welsh mine. . . .*" She took her hands from her face. "But it's a lie. I don't believe this can ever end. Oh, Keith—help me—"

He did not move. He said to her, as she stood weeping: "Fantastic stuff we are, Miss Stranlay! Not you and I only. All the human adventure. . . . Here, on an autumn night in Atlantis. On the edge of an adventure that probably no other thing in the cosmos will ever attempt. . . ." He paused; he stood up with clenched hands. "By God, if we should ever get back!"

"Back?"

He laughed. "I still can't forget, still can't realize that this is reality for us. Of course there's no going back."

He stood beside her, silent. Clair's thoughts were a gray blur. There came a drift of laughter from the caves. It was as though they stood, and old man and woman, outside a children's playground. And then Clair knew some more immediate matter worrying her. She touched Sinclair's arm.

"I'd forgotten. Where is Sir John?"

SIR JOHN MULLAGHAN lay wrapped in a long dark skin that might have been a dyed sheepskin but for the fact that there were no sheep in the world where he lay dying. Clair, kneeling beside him, knew that he was dying, even as he knew it himself.

His face, grimed and hirsute, as though it were the face of the one-time armaments manufacturer dead and dried and smoked in some head-hunter's hut, looked up at her and then suddenly shriveled and then grew bloated in one of the spasms of pain that were unceasing.

The odor of that corner of the cave was horrible. But Clair knelt unhorrified. The din of the golden communal life was stilled about them—strange thing this prehistoric foreshadowing of long sick-room silences round many a bed of pain through many a thousand years! In the roof-spaces of the cave the great aurochs stood belling eternally, the mammoth walked the open plains with flailing trunk, the uintatherium strayed from his geological epoch still bunched in frozen charge. . . . Clair saw that the night had come down.

"I'm glad you're back safely, Miss Stranlay. Nice engagement party?"

She smiled down at him unsteadily. "Lovely."

"That's good." His gray head moved dimly, the words came staccato, as by an effort. "Unfriendly—if I'd gone—without waiting for your return."

"You're not going. It's just difference of food, Keith says. We'll hunt up berries and green stuff for you to eat. You'll be well as ever in a day or so."

"Sinclair didn't say that, I fear. I'm poisoned—very unpleasantly and thoroughly, and can't eat anything. All in all, a very shocking exhibit, Miss Stranlay." She saw the ghost of a smile. "Nature didn't design me for a caveman, I'm afraid. . . . You've come back in time. There is the rain again."

So it was. Thunderously. Suddenly, beyond the cave-rims, the cup of darkness cracked. Lightning played and shimmered in the interstices, filling the cave with echoes. Then the darkness closed again. Clair saw Sinclair standing beside them, kneeling beside them.

"Drink this, Mullaghan."

"What is it?"

"Herb broth. I found a hollow stone and have had it cooking the last two hours."

The gray head moved upward painfully. Clair looked away. Then:

"Sorry, Sinclair, I'm afraid I can't."

"All right. Don't worry. I'll bring some water."

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For a full minute after the American had gone he lay so silent that Clair thought he had fallen asleep. But he moved, again in pain. He chuckled, unexpectedly, surprisingly.

"The head of the League of Militant Pacifists acting as sick-nurse to an armaments manufacturer!"

"I'll help him now I'm back."

He spoke, but did not seem to answer her. "And Clair Stranlay, the novelist. But there are fine things in her, I think, though her books are the nonsense of the half-educated.

"Courage and honesty and a happy pessimism. . . . Her books? They are just such desperate, half-articulate, half-unconscious protestings as Sinclair's threats of sabotage and assassination. . . . The savages of civilization. . . .

" 'Savages!' My God, Merton, the fantastic nonsense we have been taught! I lived in the midst of a paleolithic tribe twenty-five thousand years ago. Heroes and kindly women, kindly children all of them. And you have spent your life blackening the memory of them in your lectures and classes—and I have spent mine in murdering their descendants.

"I didn't *know*. . . ."

He said in a whisper: "We murdered her sweetheart—a boy—on the barb-wire outside Mametz. She told me. That was why she went away with the hunter that afternoon. Lost somewhere in the Atlantis hills. . . ."

The night wore on.

Sinclair came and went continuously, with water which he boiled above the far bright fire by the near entrance. Once he said to Clair:

"You can't do anything. You had better go and lie down."

"Not until he sleeps."

"Mr. Speaker, in moving support of this bill for disarmament by example, I am aware that I am both contradicting previous utterances of my own and taking a line of action in direct opposition to that pursued by the great party to which I belong, and to my own private interests. But I plead for my former attitude an ignorance of the essential nature of man as crass as any member of this House may ever have confessed to.

"I lived the scientific delusions of my age—strengthened as these delusions were by the act of a stray madman which brought a very bitter tragedy into my own life. . . . But the wreck of the airship, of *Magellan's Cloud* on the ancient continent of Atlantis, and my experiences there in company with two other survivors, among primitive men who were our own ancestors—literally, sir, opened my eyes.

"I found no 'howling primordial beast'; I saw nothing to indicate that man is by nature a cruel and bloodthirsty animal. It became plain to me that the vicious combativeness of civilized man is no survival from an earlier epoch: it is a thing resultant on the torturing dreads of civilization itself. The famous Chinese poet and philosopher Lao-Tze, writing of a Golden Age which has been considered mythical, yet describes in vivid detail the character and conduct of those Stone Age primitives among whom I lived during an eventful fortnight.

"They loved one another without knowing that to do so was benevolence; they were honest and leal-hearted without knowing that it was loyalty; they employed the services of one another without thinking that they were receiving or conferring any gift. Therefore their actions left no trace and there was no record of their affairs. . . ."

The sound of the rain! Clair heard it rise gustily and drown in momentary volume of sound the speech that Sir John Mullaghan, remote in space and time, was delivering to the English House of Commons. The helpless pity of the first hour of watching was past. In an unimpassioned clarity her mind went on with that speech, as though she also were addressing an unborn multitude in that future from which she had come, and which she would never see again. . . .

No record? Except that somehow Zumarr and Aerte and Belia, each and all of them sleeping here in this wild night, were to live through the ages, to pass undying through them, to rise again in the

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Christs and Father Damiens, the Brunos and the Shelleys, the comradeship and compassion of the slave pit and the trench. No record! They were to live though all else died; they were ghosts of a sanity that haunted mankind.

THIS adventure in pre-history! As if any woman whatever who had loved a man and been by him loved, did not know the true nature of the kindly child immortal, though cult and environment twisted his mind and instincts, though press and pulpit shouted that he was by nature a battling animal, a sin- and cruelty-laden monster! What slum-dweller did not know his neighbor a peaceable man unless one of civilization's innumerable diseases drove him to momentary madness? . . .

She started drowsily, sleep pressing on her eyelids. Sir John talking or herself thinking? She heard him then, his voice clear and sharp:

"Gentlemen, we must transform our factories to other purposes. There are still bridges to be built and tunnels to be excavated. Flying-machines. . . . We have barely glimpsed the universe in which man adventures, yet you and I have sat in this room and planned murder and destruction and called it business and patriotism. . . ."

He murmured a phrase: "The Militant Pacifists. . . ." Then: "Sinclair? We will have him on our board."

Sinclair came tiredly through the red-ochered murk at that moment, and again held water to dim lips. All the cave was as some gigantic Arcadian sarcophagus: it seemed to Clair, as once before, that it was a place of the long-dead in which she knelt, and overhead washed the Atlantic. . . . Sir John said, very distinctly:

"Miss Stranlay—I thought she was here?"

"So she is. Here she is."

He peered up at them, his eyes very bright. "I've been dreaming—that next war. You two—promise me you'll get back, get back and tell them!"

"We'll get back," Sinclair said steadily.

"You must get back. They're planning it again. . . . Tell them, Sinclair. Fight them even with your bombs if they won't listen. . . . They *shall* listen. For there was hope even in that age out of which we came—more hope than ever before since civilization began. Else we could never have dreamed this dream, we three who are its children. The slayer and the soldier pass and Man will walk the earth again. . . ."

He began to speak in a low singing voice, so low that Clair had to bend nearer to hear him:

"'The world's great age begins anew,
The golden years return,
The earth doth like a snake renew
Her winter skin outworn:
Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam
Like wrecks of a dissolving dream....'"

Clair felt the American's hand on her shoulder in the ensuing silence. He gave a sigh of relief.

"He's sleeping now. We can take it easy. If you're as dead-beat as I am—Hell, what was that?"

CHAPTER TEN

EXODUS

IT WAS as though a great beast stirred in dreams under the floor of the cave. Clair was instantly on her feet beside the American. She saw it was close to dawn: the river glimmered beyond the fires. The watcher of the fires himself squatted not far away, nodding, undisturbed, though the faintest rustle of a nearing beast would have roused him to instant activity.

Clair whispered, "What was it?"

"Remember back beside the lake? Some kind of earthquake shock. . . . Here it is again."

The cave rocked. They held to each other for a moment. The shock passed. Clair peered past the drowsy fire-watcher. "These people must be used to it. None of them has wakened."

Not a hunter or a woman had stirred. They lay and slept in healthy disregard of the earth's freakish moods. The fires burned low, yet glowed enough to show the painted uintatherium still bunched with head eternally lowered. Funny to think that that beast ("at this moment!") in the twentieth century might still survive in this cave long sunk two miles or more below the level of the ocean! . . . The thought made Clair whisper another question:

"Wasn't this continent sunk in an earthquake?"

She saw a pallid flicker of a smile on Sinclair's face. "*Will* be. . . . Let's see if anything's happening outside."

The fire-tender nodded to them. They

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paused at the cave-entrance and looked out. Nothing. The rain had cleared away. The sky was pallid with the waning lights of the stars awaiting the morning. The crispness of the air caught at their throats. But there was also in that air an unusual quality.

"Sulphur," said Sinclair. "Stay here. I'm going out to look."

He vanished, tall and white, into that waiting unease of the morning. Clair thought: "Dictatorial still. But a dear." Yawned. "Oh, my good God, what wouldn't I give for a cup of tea!"

Startling thought! Years, surely since she had visioned such wistful amenities! . . . She yawned again. "Thank goodness Sir John's asleep at last. . . . Enough!"

She became aware of a pillared whiteness, like Lot's wife, against the grayness of the morning. It was Sinclair, beckoning.

The grass was wet and cold. The morning wind blew chill on them as they passed together outside the farthest flow of the cave-fires' radiance and climbed over the smooth back of the bluff. And, as they did so, the smell of sulphur increased with every step they took. Nearing the top of the bluff, Clair, looking upward, suffered a curious optical illusion. It seemed to her that the grass on the knoll, that the whole summit, was lighted to an unwonted glow, as though a great fire were kindled on the other side. But, the summit attained, she saw she had suffered from no delusion. She gasped and stared.

IN THAT hour they should have seen but a little way across the jumble of foot-hills and nullahs toward the mountain land which they had descended a short week before. Instead, all that landscape which should have lain in morning darkness was lighted uneasily, a welter of unstable candle-points of flame, and backgrounding it, mile on mile, from one end of the horizon to the other, was a dark-red glow that glimmered and faded and grew to purple being and then died again, yet never quite, like a fire that lives in a half-charred stick.

Momentarily, as they watched, the red and ocher faded from the glow, yet that was through no waning of its strength, as they saw, but with the coming of the morning. And with that coming the mystery grew plainer: The whole of the dim mountain land of their first adventures had vanished into some fissure of the earth from which now arose the corona of its destruction.

Twenty miles away to the north the vivid line of flame stalked the horizon, and in the nearer distance they saw a pale advancing gleam.

"Floods—it's the sea!" said Clair.

Sinclair peered forward from beneath his hands. "Hell, and it is! We'll have to run for it."

But he did not. He said, a second later: "It's advancing no longer. Only through the light growing it seems to be. The floods have stopped."

So it seemed, now. Daylight was almost upon the land, and the havoc of fire and water grew clearer. The sea had come far in—in places it was not more than two or three miles distant. More than that. They stood now on what was a great promontory, for this was higher land than to east and west. And, advancing out of the water-threatened, cobalt valleys were long trains of moving objects that ran and squealed and jostled. Clair saw them coming, up out of the morning, dipping and rising, here and there covering the hills in dun hordes.

"Trek of the animals," said Sinclair. "Look—the mammoths!"

A great herd of them led the exodus. They came at racing speed, great tusks uplifted, trunks uplifted, untrumpeting, with flying coats of dun-red hair. They thundered past not half a mile away. Then Clair saw her first aurochs, also running in herds, the gigantic beasts whose lowing she had listened to many a time since that first night by the lake.

Horned and maddened, with belching breaths of spume they ran, swinging round the corner of the bluff so that Sinclair, seeing the danger there might be to the cave-dwellers below, turned and ran down the hill, calling to Clair to stay where she was. Safest place. . . . Clair sank down in the wet grass, staring appalled. It was as though the hills were the contours of a wet corpse, insanely, titanically bemagotted.

"Oh, horrible!"

The hills drummed with flying hoofs. Great deer, and Irish elk, a pack of lions like loping St. Bernards, here and there a trundling bear: Then herd on herd of ponies, with manes in quivering serration. The day brightened, and with its brightening the glow in the north abruptly flickered and vanished. The pulsing flight of beasts thinned, but the birds still passed overhead in great flocks, tern

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and snipe and partridges either momentarily startled or out on definite migration through the weaving of some mysterious instinct.

Up till then no animal had attempted the scaling of the bluff, but now two leopards did so. Sly and suave, they came in loping bounds, not greatly frightened, evidently, though in flight. One had been swimming, and the water glistened on its sleek black coat. They slithered leftward at sight of the kneeling woman. Then one crouched and snarled—

The charge of the brute rolled her on the ground. It had charged, not leaped, being over-hungry, and had hit her with its shoulder, instead of pinning her to the earth. Its body sprawled across her, furry and musk and smelling vilely. She thought vividly, "My throat!" and screamed, and saw the other leopard looking away, with pricked ears. She caught the wurring muzzle of the brute above her. Screamed again. She was dragged to her feet by Aerte. She wiped her face; she laughed hysterically.

All over in a minute. Three of the hunters, Aerte included, had seen the leopards and raced them up the opposite side of the hill. She saw Sinclair ascending more slowly, now that she was safe. Aerte laughed. She could not look at the smoking, furred thing on the ground. The other leopard had fled.

When Sinclair came up she was still trembling.

"Goodness—I—I always did hate cats. Never bathe. . . . Silly to shake, but I can't stop it. I think I'll go down to Sir John."

Sinclair looked at her apathetically; sat down. She was safe; the caves were safe. He felt he wanted to sleep for a month.

"Sir John is dead," he said tiredly.

THE sun lay brave on the hillside. The day marched bannered across the Atlantean sky. Little clouds tinged with purple went sailing by, free and very fleecy and lovely. More of the bird-flocks came from the north, holding into dim southern regions of the Pleistocene earth. Far below, in the open spaces between the caves and the river, the Cro-Magnards cut up the meat which had come, alive and maddened, past their doors in such abundance.

And on the hill-brow Clair and Sinclair watched the passing of the day. Clair sat resting and thinking, and yet trying not to think.

She looked at the American.

"But it can't be! He can't have died. We don't belong here; it couldn't have happened this way in time! Else he was dead long before he was born. This would have happened to him before we knew him. Before the *Magellan* was wrecked he was dead." She giggled a little bit. "We've been talking to a corpse all this last fortnight."

Sinclair said nothing bleakly. Clair, exhausted, dozed. Later, she felt a hand on her shoulder, and aroused to Sinclair speaking at last.

"I won't leave you long. Shout if anything comes near."

"Where are you going?"

But he had gone. She sat, clasping her knees, sun-warmed, earth-kissed, vividly aware of the beauty and pleasure of her self. And below, in the Cro-Magnard caves, was that other body, finished with this and the sun and the rain and the hearing of laughter forever. Impossibly dead in an impossible country in an impossible epoch.

She remembered, numbedly, half-forgotten things about him—his courteous care of her, and her flouting of it, in that march across the plateau; his pathetic adaptations to Cro-Magnard ways. . . . "Oh, my good God, I am so tired!"

She looked back over the bluff. Sinclair and two hunters, burdened, were coming up. A few feet from Clair they halted. One of the hunters was Aerte.

They lowered something to the ground.

Next instant she found Aerte beside her. He put his arms round her. He laughed gravely and pointed down to the river in the sunlight. His brows knitted puzzledly as she shook her head and indicated the body wrapped in the pelt from the cave. He glanced at it indifferently, smiled again and tried to pull her to her feet. She shook him off; his touch was suddenly as shuddersomely repulsive as that of an unclean animal.

"Keith—*send him away.*"

She did not look round again as the American spoke to the two hunters, but she heard the sound of a lingering, puzzled retreat through the low brittle grass. Then the noise of Sinclair digging with a hand-ax. At that she rose and went and helped him. They worked in silence.

"Stand away, Miss Stranlay."

She stood aside and looked down over the flood-sodden lands. Already the darkness waited for them. She heard Sin-

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clair dragging the body to the shallow pit. Then a sound of scraping and the fall of earth. Sinclair said:

"Throw some earth, Miss Stranlay."

She turned round, seeing the grave almost completed. She picked up a handful of clayey dust and dropped it through her fingers. Sinclair replaced the turf and walked over it, stamping it gently.

Then he held out his hand to Clair and she went to him.

IT SEEMED to her that something had numbed her body and brain alike, through and through, in the next twenty-four hours. The second nightfall Sinclair came and sat down beside the fire of Zumarr, who glanced at him questioningly and from him toward another fire at which the hunter Aerte had again taken up quarters, as in times before the Mating for the Dark Days.

"Clair."

She roused a little. "Oh, it's you, Keith."

He stretched himself out beside her. His square dark head was oddly similar to Zumarr's. She thought, apathetically, "They might be brother and sister." He put a twig on the fire, absently, scowlingly, as was his habit, and watched it consume. Abruptly he said:

"This can't go on, you know."

She said dully: "What?"

He seemed to be considering his answer. Then:

"These people aren't to blame, Clair, but you. I mean your hunter and the others when they thought Mullaghan's death and dead body of no account. Neither, really, were they. Death is of no account in fundamental human values—the things these people live by. Your hunter saw a man lying dead—one to whom he had never talked, a puzzling stranger, a man who had presumably lived to the full, and was now dead, as was the order of things.

"And if your hunter thought about it at all, it was simply that he himself would also die some time, but meantime there was living to be done—eating, and marrying with you, and painting his pictures, and hunting, and every moment in which to live his body before he also was dead. That was all. It was perfectly natural."

"I know. And it has made me sick and frozen."

"It has no cause to make you any such things. If he'd seen Sir John lying ill or wounded he'd have carried him miles to safety. You know he would. They are absolutely unselfish and absolutely natural. Nothing horrible in death to them; there *is* nothing horrible in death.

"It is merely that you and I are laden down with the knowledge of that past that is not yet—with all the dismal funeral rites in our memory and that ritual of sorrow that isn't natural at all, but was an artificial thing foisted on human nature in a matter of mistaken science. It is these people who are clean and you who are diseased."

"I know," Clair said again. And suddenly she found words. "Oh, Sinclair, I'll go mad, I know I will, in this horrible place, among these horrible people! Natural and clean? Of course they are. Splendid and shining and lovely, all of them. Aerte—he's my promised husband. . . . And they're not kin to me at all. I'm separated from them by a bending wall of glass. I'm not human if they are. I'm the diseased animal, and it's not the winter or the memory of Sir John that'll kill me. It's realization of a fact. I can't go on with it, I can't!"

"You filthy little weakling."

He said it in a low even voice. Clair suddenly found herself in the cave. Something seemed to contract and then clot about her heart. She stared at the American. He looked at her evenly.

"You little gutter-snipe of the London slums! I thought you had guts in you. You haven't. You've a pious rotten romanticism that's no relation to reality. Think I don't know—that I haven't watched your antics ever since I was fool enough to drag you out of the *Magellan?* And I was a fool; I fooled myself about you. Here, especially.

"I thought this place and these people had done to you what they did to me and poor Mullaghan—discovered the human in you. But there wasn't a human to discover. You're only a sack of second-rate opinions, and third-rate fears. Human! A thing like you!"

Clair shook herself and leaned forward to the fire and also put a twig on it. Then she laughed and gave a long sigh, and, looking at Sinclair, shook her head.

"Thanks. But it's really not necessary."

He flushed, suddenly, darkly. "I thought it might work."

"It has, in a way." She raised her head and looked across the cave toward Aerte's fire. "Goodness. . . . Sorry I've been all you said."

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"You haven't, of course. . . . But I need help as well, Clair. All this stuff I talked—about the naturalness of regarding death casually—I know as well as you do that it's impossible for us, just as it's impossible for us ever to live the lives of these hunters. I know that wall of glass as well. . . . But Mullaghan's gone, and if you went and I were left on my own—I also don't want to go mad. . . ."

CLAIR said soberly: "I'm both sick and sorry. Oh, I'm damnably selfish." She held out her hand. "I don't think we've ever been friends. Can't we be?"

He held her hand a moment. She thought, "Funny how like his eyes are to some one's—" He said: "This is the last night in these caves."

She was startled. "Why?"

"You haven't heard, of course. They've left you alone, thinking you're sick. But the exodus was decided on this afternoon. There's no game anywhere in the flooded country round about, nor anywhere to the south as far as the hunters have penetrated. That earthquake and the sinking of the mountain land has left this section a deserted peninsula. The cave is going to be abandoned tomorrow."

"And where are they going?"

"Southward, somewhere, in pursuit of the game. And it's not only threat of famine, of course. You haven't noticed, not being outside the cave. But there was frost this morning; the new lagoons, half salt at that, were covered with ice. It'll be a winter of such terrors as these people have never endured—at least as far north as this."

Clair looked at the painted animals overhead. "And they're to leave. . . ." It seemed that she herself had occupied these caverns for months. Then: "We knew that this happened in pre-history, of course—or will happen. . . . Goodness, tenses do get mixed in the time-spirals. . . . Is this the coming of the Ice Age?"

"I don't think so. It's just that Atlantis is the most unstable of the continents. That, of course, we know from the future out of which we've come. It's doomed."

"And these people?"

"They're the ancestors of the Cro-Magnards from Cro-Magnon in France, remember. So some of them at least are to push eastward, and some years or generations hence strike Europe. Or at least, that preceded the future we knew."

"Isn't it bound to happen, then?"

"Not necessarily. Perhaps the future we came from was one of many possible futures—"

"I thought that—once—but I'd forgotten."

"There was nothing fixed and real about that twentieth century of ours, Clair. Civilization as we knew it—it has still to happen. Perhaps it need never happen. Perhaps we can prevent it, sabotage it in advance—"

It had grown dark again. The Cro-Magnards were turning to sleep. The evening was frostily clear and set with frosty stars. Clasping her knees and looking out as she listened to Sinclair, Clair thought of Sir John Mullaghan. *"Think but one thought of me up in the stars—"* said a vagrant line. . . . She turned her attention back to the American.

"There is no need for the processes of history, as we know them, ever to take place. You and I can alter the very beginnings. Listen: We're going south, and it will get warmer. Somewhere beyond the southward mountains we saw from the plateau these people will find new hunting-grounds. Then you and I can get to work. We can teach them the beginnings of civilization without any of civilization's attendant horrors."

"What, for example? I'm horribly ignorant."

He shook his head. "It's just that you don't realize what you know. Pitchers—they've never thought of using gourds to store water at night. That for a beginning. Then in hunting: I'm engaged in making a bow. But these are the lesser things. Somewhere beyond those southward mountains we'll find a river and wild millet or barley or corn. We can start the first agriculture—plowing and seeding will be simple enough. That for next spring. And in the summer get them to build a corral and drive wild cattle into it; they can tame them in a few years.

"Next autumn take a party prospecting in the mountains—I know something about metals. . . . Flax or hemp growing, perhaps. Even with crude metal implements and rough fiber bandagings I could save half the women who die in childbirth. And iodine and such-like are easy enough extracts. . . . We can leap twenty thousand years and take these people with us if we plan it carefully. Preserve this sane equality that's theirs, take care that no idea of gods or kings

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or devils ever arises in their minds. We can transform humanity."

CLAIR began to kindle to his words. If they could! "But—aren't the cruelties and the taboos bound to rise with civilization? Better to leave our hunters alone for the Golden Age that is still theirs than try and fail."

"We won't fail. Much better to leave them if there was any chance of failure. If there were no choice for the future but history as we know it, a thing inevitable awaiting these people, it would be better for them and better for the world if we poisoned them all or drove them to death by starvation.

"But there's no reason why we should fail. The foul things of civlization were an accident. . . . Time and history will go on long after we're dead here in Atlantis, Clair, but there need never be a pyramid built or a city massacred or a war or a miners' strike. We can remake the world."

"Goodness, we will! . . . Keith, there's Gloezel!"

"Eh?"

"Don't you remember reading about it a few years back? That place in France where heaps of Neolithic relics were dug up, and were said to be fakes because they were mixed with modern-looking bottles and jars and the scratchings of a primitive alphabet? . . . Perhaps this experiment we're going to try was known to us already in that twentieth century from which we came! Perhaps Gloezel saw the end of this plan of yours, and men of those days forgot your teachings, and the civilizations and the savageries rose in spite of the dream we brought these hunters."

Sinclair laughed and stood up. "Perhaps there have been other voyagers into time than you and I. Perhaps time and history can not be altered. Yet if they can—"

Somewhere in the depths of the caves a sick child was crying. He stood and listened to it and then looked down in Clair's fire-bright face.

"There need never be a lost baby crying again in the world that we can make."

And next day the Cro-Magnards of that nameless valley in Atlantis left the fires in the painted caves still burning, and gathered their children and their implements and the skins of the beasts they had killed in generations of hunting, and forded the river, and turned to the south.

The rain cleared, and a cold sun shone, and far in the north the new lakes shivered in a brisk wind. They passed through a deserted country, with not even birds in it. They passed out of the Atlantean valley as dream-people pass from a dream dreamed by a drowsy fire. Coming from the east or west hundreds of years before, their ancestors, a people with a no-history of millennia, descendants of the dawn-men who lived in Java and Peking and the Sussex downs, had descended upon the valley, a place of good hunting, and settled there.

And the years had passed in the flow and ebb of death and love and birth, times of plenty and times of famine, was neither memory of the past nor fears of hopes for the future. The sun and the wind, the splendor of simple things, had been theirs: theirs that Golden Age that was to live for ever, a wistful thing, in the minds of men.

Now they were out on an adventure that followed no road Clair Stranlay could fore-plot.

They carried their sick and their aged with them, and they went gayly enough, with laughter and singing, the young men stringing out far in advance across the southern savannas. They went in no great order, but a friendly southward drift. Alone perhaps of them all Clair and Sinclair stopped a little while and looked back.

"There will be fishes swimming in that cave years hence," said Clair.

"Poor Mullaghan!"

And that was strange enough to think of also. Thousands of years away, perhaps preserved uncorrupted and incorruptible by the pressures of water and rock, the body of Sir John Mullaghan would lie in that grave they had dug for it with the flint spears of Cro-Magnard hunters.

The knoll glimmered.

"And now—" said Sinclair.

So they too turned about and went, their white faces strange phenomena still in the wake of the golden men of the dawn. The savannas rose green and brown and cobalt in the distance. Far and remote beyond these, many days' journeyings away, were the mountains where Sinclair planned to change the course of history.

Behind them, the winter followed on their tracks.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

CLAIR LOST

CLAIR STRANLAY was lost.

She looked back, shading her eyes with her hand against the pale afternoon sunlight, to the track she had taken across the withering grass to this eminence in the southern foot-hills. But all the country was desolate and deserted, except by a far loch where curlews called and called. Nothing moved or took to itself animate being in that still land, with the forests marching on its fringes and the sun—silver, not gold at all—brooding upon the quietness. Up that track she had come. But before that?

She sat down to consider the matter. There was the forest. But which forest? The country was ribbed with just such masses of trees, and the rise and fall of nullahs confused all knowledge as to whether one mass was a separate entity or the winding continuation of another. . . . Goodness, such a fool not to watch the course of the sun!

"I'm shockingly hungry," said Clair aloud.

The silent countryside took no notice. Clair pushed her hair from her eyes and stood up again. It would be nonsensical to rest now. Somewhere, from higher up, she would be bound to see the hunters or the encampment.

She climbed through grass that was sedgy because of a trickle of water from the hillside. A ridge, like the scales on the back of a stegosaurus, ran along its summit. Here the grass gave place to lichened rock—granite rock, she noted, and red granite at that. The sight brought back a memory—oh, holiday bathing at Peterhead in Scotland, of course. Twenty-five thousand years before.

The red slivers cut her feet, hardened though these had grown. But at last, though with some difficulty, she attained a platform-ledge that dominated all the hill and indeed all the country. Panting, she looked again into the north.

Made miniature in distance, the land was otherwise unchanged. No sign of the Cro-Magnards or their encampment anywhere.

If she made a fire—?

Realization of a startling fact chilled her a little. She had nothing with which to make a fire. She glanced down at the short-bladed flint spear in her hand. Flint. But no iron pyrite. The hunters used tinder and a drum-stick—things she was incapable of operating. No chance of raising a fire. Must watch for one instead.

For how long? She looked at the sun. Perhaps three hours more of daylight. She turned round slowly, in a circle, looking about her. So, very suddenly, she became aware at last of the mountains of the south.

From her stance, and for the first time in the southward trek, she saw them uprise plainly. Not only so, but gigantic. They filled all the southern horizon with their tumbled shapes. Distant, Andean, some trick of refraction allowed her to see the sun filtering into immense canyons, splashing in the remote upland tarns, crowning each point with quicksilver. The significance of that last gleam dawned on her.

"Snow."

They were perhaps twenty miles away. From right to left of the horizon they stretched unbroken, tenebrous and question-evoking. Were they passable?

She thought: "Keith's plan to take the hunters south of them—he may never be able to carry it out. Necessary to try out our experiment on a southward river, protected by mountains in the north. . . . Wonder what he's doing now? Missed me? Sure to."

She had an afterthought, and smiled at it, absently. "And Aerte as well, I suppose."

How far away, both of them? Miles and miles, surely. Goodness, what a fool— .

But thinking that wouldn't help.

It was nine days since the beginning of their trek from the ancient cave. Acting on the apparently casual suggestion of Sinclair, the Cro-Magnards had held as directly southward as the nature of the country allowed. It was to them a matter of indifference what direction was taken, so long as game grew more plentiful. And certainly neither to left nor right was there that plenitude. But one colony of lions the general exodus of the animals had left behind, and on the fifth night of the trek these beasts, made bold by hunger, had raided the camp, a score or more of them.

Clair and Sinclair had been awakened by the screams and shouts, and stirred to see a fire geyser under the impact of a lion landing from a misdirected spring. Clair had caught up a torch and thrust

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it into the face of one brute. Near her Zumarr had been killed and nearly disemboweled by the stroke of a huge paw. The fighting in the semi-darkness about the fires had gone on for many minutes. Then the lions had retreated, dragging several bodies with them. Devouring these, they had squatted all night in a semicircle beyond the fires, evidently determined not to abandon the neighborhood of this store of food which had descended on their famished land from the north.

Sinclair had gone about, binding up such wounds as grass and sinew seemed capable of salving. Aerte had come to Clair and crouched by her, looking toward the noise of the lions' grisly banqueting and gripping a spear in either hand. Then, toward the dawn, the Cro-Magnards had begun to move out toward the lions, discovering them replete and somnolent, all but two or three cubs which had had little share of the human meat. Out there, beyond the camp, a running fight began, three men and more to one beast, until the morning came. Half a dozen or so of the lions escaped. The rest, dead, were skinned, and the Cro-Magnards cooked and ate meat from their haunches. Both Clair and Sinclair had refused it.

THROUGHOUT the next day and the next, holding south again. no game at all had been encountered. Food was growing very scarce, and the half-dozen lions, made cautious, but still hungry, followed up the trek, roaring despondently at the night-time but venturing on no more raids.

But, on the morning of this day on which Clair sat lost on the summit of her hill, a boy, slipping out of the camp in the early hours on some boyish foraging of his own, had wandered for several miles and then returned in a glow and much excitement.

The lions had vanished from about the camp, and he knew the reason. A herd of mammoth, many bulls and cows and three young ones, was gathered feeding near a stream and a hill.

The news had emptied the camp, at racing speed, of the golden men. Clair had caught up a flung spear and run by Sinclair's side, the spear a thrilling complement. "Though goodness only knows what for. Unless to tickle the mammoths. . . . What, for the matter, are any of us going to do with spears against them?"

"Aerte was telling me," Sinclair had said. "We'll drive one of the animals into the river and attack it there."

So they had done. One bull, perhaps the leader of the herd, had charged the yelling attack of the Cro-Magnards, a magnificent spectacle of wrath with uplifted trunk and threatening tusks. Him they had allowed to pass without casualty, and, once past, he had stood a moment meditating discretion or valor, and then taken to the open land and safety. The others, all but the selected two, had followed him.

Driving those twain into the river was the task.

Under the urge of a hail of stones one of them at length galumphed forward into the muddy embrace of the water and sank to the knees and was held there, like a fly in glue. And, as by so many hornets, hewing and stabbing, he had been instantly assailed. Not so the second. It had broken away to the right, trampling several hunters underfoot and impaling one on a great broken tusk.

Sinclair had taken abrupt command, his dour face flushed; perhaps the first commander in the world, for even in hunting parties the Cro-Magnards had no leaders. They were an orchestra without a conductor, yet a fairly efficient one at that, acting with a serene cooperativeness that suggested to Clair telepathy. But, under the direction of Sinclair's shout, such of them as had already attended the panicked antics of the second mammoth broke into two parties.

One raced for the hills, the other held in the track of the beast. Clair had joined the first group, and ran with them, feeling in a very glow of health, and had slipped and fallen; and had laughed and scrambled to her feet and reclaimed her spear. Then she had found herself alone and lost.

As simply as that. For a time she had heard receding shoutings and once a wild trumpeting of agony that made her cover her ears. She had made in the direction of both sounds, as she believed. Neither could be more than half a mile distant. And no sign of hunters or hunted had met her eyes.

She had found herself in a series of low valleys, one fitting into the other with the suave necessity of shallow boxes in a Chinese puzzle. And when finally she had emerged from the labyrinth into open country again, it was a country of which she had no knowledge.

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No river was in sight, other than one glistening far across the savanna. It had seemed too distant to be the one where the first mammoth had been killed, and she had disregarded it and searched in other directions. And when she would have sought for it again it had disappeared.

She had wandered the deserted Atlantean country since then, once stopping to drink at a pool, once finding a nest with three eggs in it, curious speckled eggs which she had broken and eaten raw, very thankful that they were fresh. Then she had hunted on again.

And this seemed the day's end of the hunt.

Bound to follow her. But could they? With a certain uncertainty gripping her she turned now from survey of the gigantic bastion in the south, and looked at the country out of which she had climbed. They had no dogs, they had no special scent themselves: scent was nothing to primitive man, was probably a later acquirement of specialized savages. She would have to wait until darkness and then look for the light of a fire somewhere down there. And food—

Beyond her hill, eastward, was another, and between the two of them a gleam of water. She realized the thirst parching her throat, and began to descend from the scaled back of the granite stegosaurus. The sun flung her a long shadow eastward as she walked, but it was only as she neared the foot of the hill and the water was near that she saw a mist was rising or descending from nowhither.

Between her and the distant nameless Andes the undulating, sparsely forested land was sheathed in an uneasy garment of damp wool. By the time she had knelt down and drunk and stood up again, the mist was all about her. She stood in uncertainty of it, walked a few steps, halted, determined to climb her hill again. But the hill had disappeared. Or rather the hill-summit had.

Now she walked along a rolling shoulder of earth that was either of the original eminence, or of that second hill she had seen in the east. A tickling sensation disturbed her chest; then her nose. Abruptly she began to sneeze, desperately. She sought for a handkerchief she did not possess. The fit passed in a moment, but not the constricted feeling in her throat. She thought, dismayed, "Goodness, if I'm in for a cold!"

She came to another tarn. It reflected her face and body as her feet touched the edge. She leaned on her spear and looked down at herself.

"Pretty thing still," she said, still regarding herself. A woman had come into the water and looked up at her gravely, from under a heavy short-cut mane of brown hair with the red slightly bleached from it. But the red tints were still in eyes and brows, and her face had a brownness set on it evenly, as though out of a jar.

So indeed her flesh was now tinted, yet in some fashion that left it none the less white. Rubbed to warmth, she picked up the spear again, and, leaving that reflection of herself to dream of her for ever, perhaps, in that lost pool, went on into a mist that presently cleared, like a curtain drawn aside, to disclose the splendors of the sunset on the Atlantean Alps.

They changed and took separate form and advanced and retreated as she looked, like a company of warriors in gold and gray and the panoply of war.

With purple from the murex the sunset had garbed them, and with the red of rust, and a blue—an ultramarine blue that must have found its colors in those high glacial snows. . . . Clair had never seen such a sunset, and the stalking approach of darkness at her lower level was almost upon her before she noticed it.

With that darkness came a bitter coldness and a wind that seemed somehow dissociated from the cold, but cold itself. . . . And suddenly Clair knew that she was being tracked.

The beast had snuffled in a peculiar way. She wheeled round and saw nothing. Then—a hump of rock she had not noticed when she passed that way. It was not a hump of rock. The beast was crouching. There was not light enough for its eyes to gleam, she saw merely the dim shape, hunched, and the twitching of its ears. She thought: "Is it going to spring?"

She turned round and went on. The padding came on as well. This time she wheeled so rapidly that she saw the beast, not crouching this time, but on its feet, its ears still twitching.

And it was not a beast.

TO CLAIR it seemed that she stood and faced the thing through minute after minute of horror-struck silence. The spear was gripped and useless for

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the blood had deserted her hand. It grew momentarily darker, in wave on wave of lapping shadow from the sunset fire in the mountains of the south. And still Clair stood and stared wide-eyed at that hideous apparition out of pre-history.

It was a male, with the bigness of a gorilla and something of its form. It was hung with dun-red hair; crouched forward, its shoulders were an immense stretch of arching muscle and bone. Its gnarled hands almost touched the ground. It smelled. It stared at her filmily, and a panting breath of excitement came from its open jaws.

A Neanderthaler!

The thought flashed through her mind and was instantly disputed and dismissed. For the Thing had an immense bulge of forehead and no downward-pressing neck constriction such as she had read the lost race of Neanderthal possessed. Nor had it a single implement or weapon about it. It crouched, a strange, strayed, hungry, pitiful beast, looking at her.

What it was she did not know, was never to know, that member of some lost, discarded genus of sub-men that time was utterly to annihilate. Lost as herself she suddenly realized it was, and with that realization blood came back to her hand. She raised the spear and shouted, "Shoo!"

The Thing, half in sitting posture though it was, sprang back a full yard, and then, as Clair, desperately afraid, made at it, turned and shambled off in a rapid baboon-like scrabble. And as it went it uttered a strange moaning cry, growing louder and louder as the body behind the voice receded and finally vanished into the evening.

Clair, sobbing hysterically, no sooner saw it out of sight than she turned in her original direction and ran and ran, slipping and falling over rocks and once becoming desperately entangled in a soft and hairy bush which seemed to grasp at her with clammy hands. When finally she stopped, panting, there was no echo of that moaning ululation to be heard in the deserted hills, nor any sign of her stalker.

The running had warmed her, but now, stopping, she felt the wind drive against her icily. Some shelter she must have before the night came. And there was little chance in these hills, for they were of granite, not the familiar limestone so frequently honeycombed with caverns.

Yet, in the thickening nightfall, she had not gone more than a dozen steps when fortune favored her and up the brow of the hill she saw an indentation. Attained with panting effort, she discovered it a fault of the strata that left a roofed, triangular recess some nine or ten feet deep, inadequate enough, but better than nothing.

Grass. Grass to warm it and herself.

She laid down her spear and ran to the foot of the hill where grass, sere and dry as hay, rustled and whispered eerily in that voiceless country. She tore up great armfuls of it and carried it up to the ledge. Meantime the force of the wind had increased, and as she made the last journey sleet began to pelt her body, as though she stood in an ice-cold spray from a bathroom tap.

But the ledge was a heaped fuzz of hay. She ran inside, seized the flint spear, lay down on the hay and wound herself into the swaths, rolling over and over till the faintly burred heads had entangled her in a great coverlet from head to foot. She left her right arm bare and gathered more of the hay and piled it above her in blanket-like layers. The exertion had warmed her again faintly, but her whole body was still an icy numbness. When she finished and raised her head it was to see the blackness complete but for a strange phenomenon. A white curtain wavered and shook in front of the ledge of refuge. And the rock sang as it waved and shook.

Hail.

She found she had forgotten hunger as she had forgotten to be afraid. Yet the numbness of her body had not spread to her mind. She found herself thinking and remembering in a passionate dispassion.

She thought of Aerte and that first night she had been with him in the cave far to the north, watching the volcanoes burn in the land that the seas were soon to devour. And instantly the memory passed from her. Neither Aerte—his face seemed to take shape in the darkness and then fade at once—nor that pitiful shade of Mametz seemed of importance. She thought of Sinclair, and he passed from her mind, a dour enigmatic ghost. Sir John Mullaghan—less than a ghost.

So with all she had ever known, all the tenants of the ancient world of comfort and security. Only, in the sound of the bitter hail-storm that thudded upon the hills, remained one piercing memory:

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the face of the beast-man, lost and desperate as herself; astray in time and the world.

Had he found refuge or was he out in this? What a jest of God! Millions and millions of years ago He had brought a warm fetid scum to anchor on some intertidal beach. And it had fermented through long nights and noons; and it was life. And life climbed and branched and flowered from it. And the dragons passed and the mammals rose and the great apes walked the hills of Siwalik. Westward they wandered, through millennium on millennium, gathering their little skills with stock and stone. And one by one God murdered and discarded them. For they bored Him.

Heidelberg man with the mighty skull, the ape-hunter of Piltdown, the chattering beasts of Broken Hill and the Java jungles—they passed and were not, bloody foam and spume on a sea that whimpered cruelty and change. Till this Atlantean night of hail all these experimentings of Nature's thousand millennia—they ended here in a nameless hill-land with the ape-beast and herself, last representatives of their kindred experiments. . . .

She quivered to a misty drowsiness, even while a faint voice protested through her frozen serenity, "But you are not the last!" Last she was. Poor humanity, that had dreamed so much and so splendidly—to end its dream with her! . . .

Thereon, warmed by the heat her body had engendered in the hay, utterly exhausted with her day's marchings and searchings, Clair laid her head on her hand and slept, while the hail ceased and the hand of winter drew back, hesitating a cosmic moment, from the night and hills of Atlantis.

IT began to freeze as the night wore on. The cold grew more intense. But it did not penetrate the grass coverings wherein Clair Stranlay lay enwrapped. Not cold but cramped position made her awake, and, shifting her aching hip, she saw that the hail had ceased and the moonlight had come. It flooded all the uplands and came in little waves into the recess. She lay and looked out, suddenly vividly awake. What had she been imagining before she fell asleep?

Suddenly she remembered and sighed a little at the memory. The night bent eagerly in to listen to her. She thought:

"You were hysterical, I suppose. The last woman in the world. . . . Still, supposing Keith Sinclair is all wrong, and it's into the future we've strayed, not the past? Then this damn hunger of mine must be the accumulated hunger of centuries. . . . *Pâté-de-foie-gras* sandwiches—remember them? They were very good. And spring lamb. And black coffee. And green chartreuse. And—you'd better not go on."

She pressed her hands against her small flat stomach. Her back ached.

Bright moonlight.

She wriggled a little, cautiously if light-headedly, toward the forepart of the cave. Now she could see the moonlit lands.

The silence of the strange day that had encompassed her wanderings was as nothing to this. Over a crisp white shroud that draped the countryside nothing moved or cried. Had she indeed dreamed? Was this not perhaps verily the end? Far below, to the right, a stretch of water gleamed icily, burnished and unrippled. Silence and the sweetness of death in the silence, and beyond the water the black armies of the trees.

"Forest and water, far and wide,
In limpid starlight glorified,
Lie like the mystery of death."

And God? Was there indeed no God, were He and His variants no more than mistaken science—results of that seasonal ritual that grew in the Nile Valley when men ascribed the times of flood and ripening to the mysterious, animate sun? No more? And the Christ and the Buddha and their dream of a Father Who knew if a sparrow fell? Were these no more than thin plaints of this lost adventure of mankind, crying for warmth and safety and comfort?

"Lo, I shall be with you alway, even unto the end of the world.
"Until the day break and the shadows flee away——

"Father, in Thy gracious keeping,
Leave we now thy servant, sleeping."

Phrases innumerable, lovely and gracious and shining, came to her out of the silence. Things from the Anglican burial service, from the poets, from forgotten hymns. . . .

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting. . . .

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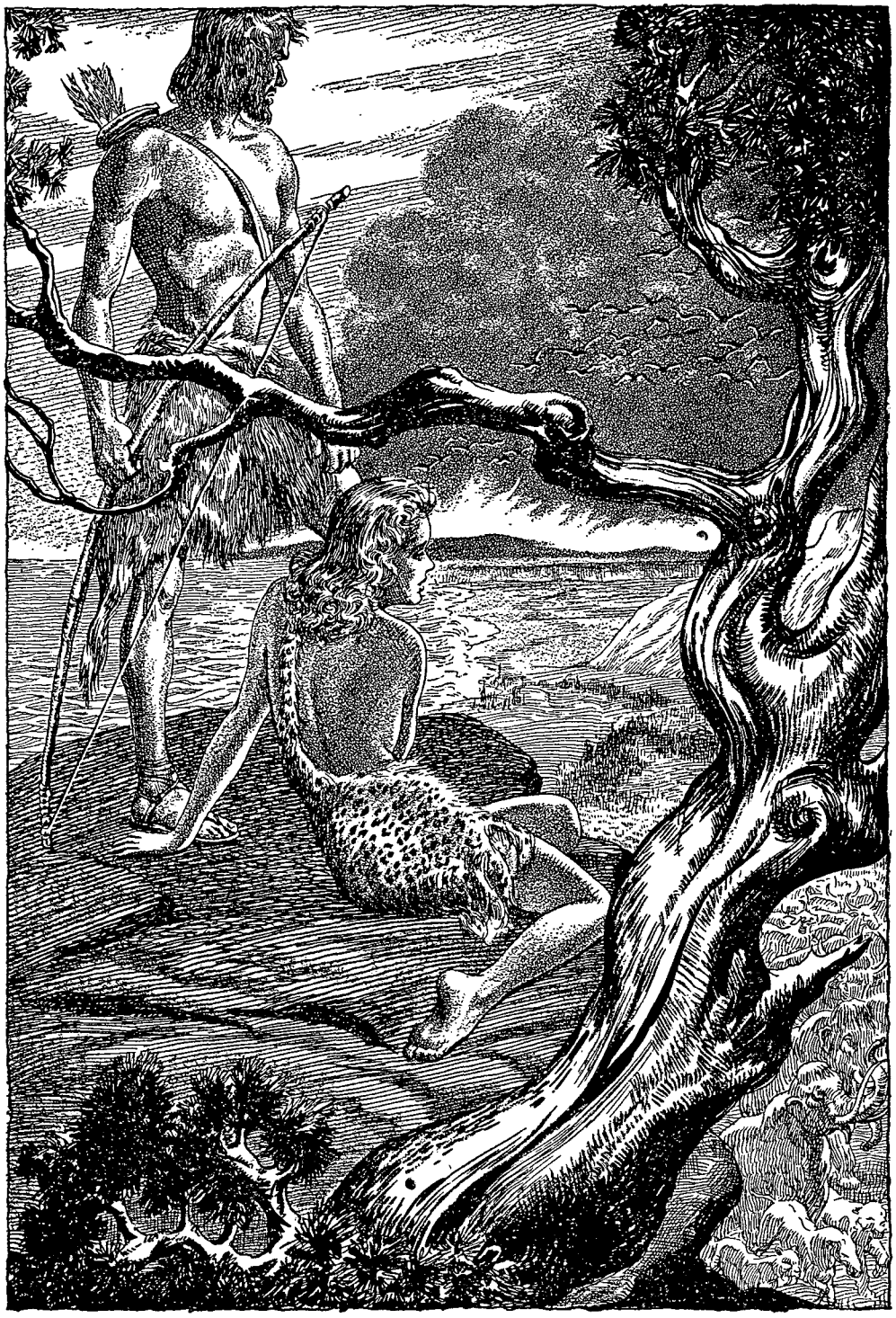

The land behind them had vanished in some fissure of the earth!

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"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son—

"So runs my dream, but what am I?
An infant crying in the night,
An infant crying for the light,
And with no language but a cry—"

Was that God only the Anglicized version of the Nile-lands sun? A dream, Himself a hope and a terror as yet unborn, undreamed of here in the wastes of Atlantis or elsewhere in this world that awaited the coming of the last Ice Age? Before Adam—this was a night before the birth of God!

Omnipotence and Omnipresence still unborn. Far up there in the stars God still lay unborn and unawakened. . . . Or dead, dead indeed if this were the last night of the world, swinging now a frozen star about an extinct sun.

"Then what am I? Why was I born to think these things? Oh, somewhere, surely, in some age to come, there's explanation. Of me and Sinclair and Sir John and the beast-man lost in these hills. Somewhere . . ."

She covered her eyes from the bright moonlight. No sound, no answer came to her. None had ever come or ever would come.

And then Clair felt no longer afraid. She dropped her hands. She addressed the frozen world in a whisper.

"You lovely thing, you can kill me and finish me. Very easily. But not that question. It's beyond your killing. It'll live long after you're dead yourself."

IN the morning she encountered and speared a half-frozen hare by the verge of the loch. Shuddering, she cut its throat and drank its blood. By nightfall she was far from the ledge where she had sheltered, holding across the savanna toward the southward mountains. That had seemed the only hope left. Toward those mountains Sinclair was guiding the Cro-Magnards and somewhere on the verge of them she would overtake or intercept the trek.

The sun had risen, powerful and hot, and the thin frost-rime went fast from grass and forest. Clair ran as much and as often as she could, but many times had to sit and rub her numbed feet, agonizingly, back to circulation. No wind came across the hill-jumbled plain, and the southern peaks seemed to come but little closer with the passing of the day. Yet the hills where she had encountered the ape-man receded almost into flatness.

She made up her mind to perch in a tree during the night; so all day she kept near the winding forest-belts, lest darkness overtake her remote from the shelter she had determined on.

For shelter, cold apart, would be necessary. The land now swarmed with game. Once she came on a nest of hyaenodon, rolling and playing and snarling happily in the sun. They desisted at sight of her, and crouched with lolling tongues, looking at her quizzically. Two, hardly more than puppies, got up and cantered after her, falling over the grass-tussocks and their own legs foolishly. A great gaunt female the size of a young heifer whined them back.

Farther on she saw a herd of aurochs among the trees, and remembered the Latin tale of these animals having no knees and being unable to kneel or lie or sleep otherwise than unchancily poised against the bole of a tree. The Romans had been misinformed.

Many of the great beasts squatted, cud-chewing and somnolent, with bulls on guard here and there. Clair passed too far off for them to take offense at her. The wonder of this passing through a land filled with wild beasts, and passing unharmed, wore off in the trudging hours.

She thought, with a return of her usual gay irony: "I'm the essential Cockney still, I suppose, and can't get rid of the notion that it's really Regent Park or the Bronx—and if any of the beasts break loose I can scream for a keeper."

But in late afternoon the direct sunlight vanished, extinguished in a driving storm of snow, soft powdery stuff that felt almost warm at first, but speedily lost that quality. The landscape became a wavering scurry, as though the very savannas were seeking shelter. Clair turned into the safety of the trees, treading a great nave of pines with underfoot a thick carpet of needles which pricked her feet. Scotch firs grew here as well, and under one of them she crept and sheltered, watching the afternoon pass grayly and the storm continue unabated.

She could still see the land she had crossed, and, presently, in a late clearing of the snow-squall, a figure nearing the forest. A human figure.

She knew it a dream or a mirage and looked away, and rubbed her eyes, and looked back again. Then she started to her feet and found herself running to-

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ward him, calling and sobbing. He saw her, dropped his load and came running toward her eagerly and caught her in his arms.

"Aerte!" she cried.

It was Keith Sinclair.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Alight in the South

HE SAID breathlessly, "Clair! Are you all right?" And she could not answer because her head was pressed against his chest, and she was breathless with running and surprise, and felt she never wanted to speak again; only to hold him and hold to him and never let him go. So for a time they stood in each other's arms, and then somehow they were apart, Clair looking up at him, still unbelievingly.

"You are Sinclair? I'm not the last left alive? Oh, Keith! . . ."

He turned away and picked up the bundle. It was a great bearskin. Beside it he had dropped a hunting spear and something else—a huge stringed bow that reached almost to his shoulder. He turned round to find Clair drying her eyes ineffectually. He saw her slim and brown-white and grimy, with snow in her hair and a ripple of goose-flesh across her shoulders. Bless her for those winter dips of hers. . . . He said: "My God, it's a long way to Kensington!"

"I thought I was lost for ever."

She darted forward and seized his spear and bow. "You dear to find me! I've got a tree to shelter under. Come along!"

The snow had begun again and they ran for the shelter of the forest. Under the Scotch fir no snow came, and only a waft of faint ice currents from the wind. Sinclair dropped his bundle and bent and untied it, not looking at her as he asked the question:

"Have you had any food?"

"I killed a hare this morning and drank its blood."

"And no fire? How did you pass the night?"

"Sheltering in a ledge up on the hills back there. I saw all the world lying dead last night, Keith."

He said, with a grimace of dour humor, "Why didn't you wave to me? That's what I felt like!"

He was gathering pine-needles and broken branches. He placed a little circle of rotten wood fragments round the heap and then fumbled in the bearskin. Some tarnished thing shone in his hand. Clair drew a long breath.

"Sir John's lighter. Does it still light?"

"He never used it after we came among the Cro-Magnards, you know. And the wadding is still a little damp with petrol —I hope." He flicked the lighter open. A tiny white-yellow flame kindled the wick. Shielding it, he knelt to the heap of twigs. The wind had ebbed round and came from the north now. The flame ran swiftly along a twig. Clair, standing, stared at it fascinatedly. A fire again! Sinclair put up a hand, and pulled her down.

"Sit here and don't let it go out. I'm going to erect a break-wind."

He bent and disappeared out of the sheltering circle of the fir-fronds, returning in a moment with an armful of boughs. He went back, foraging, and she heard him snapping off others. Presently he was beside her again, and began to construct the break-wind, interweaving from the ground up to the fir-fronds a wall of boughs. Abruptly the wind ceased to blow upon Clair's back. The fire changed from a sulky negligence to a gossipy crackling. Sinclair lay beside her.

"That's that. God, I am glad to see you."

She saw then that he was utterly exhausted. His face was pinched and dented with cold and other things, his eyes were bloodshot. Also, his feet were so torn that the blood had splashed in long streaks up past his ankles. She gave a cry at sight of them.

"They're all right." He was lying with closed eyes. "Stopped aching, and the dirt in them's clean enough." He tried to rouse himself. "There's pemmican in that parcel. Twine the bearskin round you. Keep up fire. . . ." His voice trailed off into unintelligibility. She thought he had fainted and leaned over him in some consternation.

He was asleep. Probably he had not slept all the previous night.

She undid the bundle and found inside it smoked meat, as he had said, strange spongy stuff she had never seen before. Mammoth meat? In the bundle was a package of stone-tipped arrows. Nothing else. She cut off some of the meat with the blade of the spear which had companied her, and mounted the spongy slices on arrow-heads, and crawled out

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from below the tree to collect more fuel.

There, beyond the shelter of the break-wind, she realized the salvation of Sinclair's coming. The snow had ceased again, but the wind was almost a solid thing, and awful in its numbing coldness. Darkness was driving across it, an opposing force, and she stumbled chilledly in shadows, presently sobbing through her teeth as she faced about to return to the fir.

There she found the meat smoking and Sinclair still fast asleep. She flung the skin over him and tucked it about him, and he stirred a little and muttered something; and she bent to hear what it was.

"Road to the south. She'll have taken the road to the mountains."

So he had guessed and followed on that chance? But a hazardous enough guess, and when had he made it? Not until he had reached one of those hills in which she herself had sheltered last night. That was obvious. . . . Keith Sinclair! And she had thought— she had *known* as she ran toward him—that he was Aerte.

Where were the hunters?

Useless questions. She thought, "Oh, it *is* good to eat," and ate the meat slowly, carefully, wondering if she should awaken Sinclair to share with her. But he was obviously more tired than hungry. The saltless stuff in her mouth went over without effort nowadays. But a drink—it might be impossible to find any water. She looked beyond the break-wind and saw only a smoldering landscape on the verge of night.

The break-wind had collected a drift of snow, and she gathered a handful and ate it, though she knew she invited stomach-ache. But her mouth and throat felt instantly cold and moist, and she finished the sliver of meat in her hand, and looked for the rest, and gave a little gasp. Oh, my good God, had she eaten all that?

So it seemed.

SHE piled more boughs on the fire. Now the wind was crying overhead. The Scotch fir drummed like a harp played on by a blind harper. She found handfuls of damp leaves and cones and packed them about the fire, their resinous smell homely in her nostrils. Then she crept over and lay down, pulling a corner of the bearskin over her.

From there she raised her head and looked out from below the whistling fronds of the tree, into the darkness of the forest and tundra, a darkness based on a ghostly grayness that was the snow. She felt a drowsy content upon her. She thought, withdrawing a chilled arm into shelter, 'Goodness, how little we need for comfort!'

Two savages in a forest on a snowing night. A fire, food, a break-wind and a bearskin. And men had toiled and planned and invented elaborate explorer's equipment and central heating and safety devices when they might have had this for nothing—and conquered the stars and split the atom in the generations devoted to worrying over houses sound-proof and wind-proof, and, as they had had at length to construct them, fool-proof. . . . Her hair blew a little; she felt it rise and undulate pleasantly on her head. She was about to lie down when something far away caught her attention.

At first she thought it was a star and then realized the impossibility of that. The night was too dense with storm-clouds. And, though it had the twinkling immobility of a star, it was too low down there in the horizon of the south. But it gleamed brightly, like a torch in an unsteady hand, winking, as it seemed, across the leagues of tundra in the drive of the same blizzard as whoomed against the break-wind. What could it be?

Another volcano? But there had been no sign of a volcano during all her southward tramp of the afternoon. The Atlantean Alps were great, glacier-studded masses, not like that line of fires that had marched to the right of the original trek of Sir John and Sinclair and herself from the wreck of *Magellan's Cloud*. No volcano. It must be a fire.

But kindled by whom?

Staring across the night, a maze of drowsy speculations unfolded in her brain. Other Cro-Magnards? But were there any, other than those she knew? Perhaps—who knew!—another party of explorers from the outer rims of Time, sucked into this epoch by just such accident as wrecked the *Magellan's Cloud*. No impossibility. People perhaps out of an age even remoter than the twentieth century, stray Utopians perhaps from A. D. ten thousand, with the most fantastic notions of the twentieth century, and never having heard of the Cro-Magnards at all. . . .

Still—perhaps simply a consignment

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from the same age and era as had caught the *Magellan!*

As she lowered her head, the remote mysterious fire vanished from her range of vision. She closed her eyes. Other twentieth-century explorers!. . . . Who would they be if she had the selection of them? The Archbishop of Canterbury, of course—to see what he thought of a people who knew not God; Mr. H. G. Wells, to find out what he thought of primitives who were neither stalking ghouls of the night nor those vexedly flea-bitten savages who scratched throughout the early pages of the *Outline;* President Hoover and Mr. Ramsay MacDonald—to learn a little about the original nature of man, and be shocked to death to find their ancestors so unwarlike that they needed no elaborate conventions to restrain themselves from throat-cutting and the disembowelment of babies; Mr. Henry Ford, with his tight narrow face, to die of a broken heart in an auto-less world; Charlie Chaplin to poke the aurochs with his stick. . . .

A small and sleepy chuckle stole out to the fire, and the wind rose to a super-blizzard, rose to the roar of a Russian *shoom,* and then fell and died. But all through these hours, and into the pale coming of the next dawn, enigmatic, the fire in the southward mountains winked across the wastes.

THE American was the first to awake, what of his unquenched hunger from the previous day. All his trunk was very warm; but his feet ached as though they had been frozen and were now in the process of thawing. The fire was out and the wind had died away and it was the beginning of daylight. He put aside the bearskin.

He remembered at once, and then, not moving, lay and looked at Clair who was still asleep.

He stood up and shivered in the waiting coldness of the morning. A moor-hen twittered. Water was not so far off. He stepped gingerly toward the fire and collected charred boughs, and scrunched around in search for Sir John's petrol lighter, and found it laid neatly at the base of the fir tree, in company with his bow.

His spear was nowhere to be seen, because at the moment Clair lay on it. He started a fire and then crept out from below the fir and held down through an avenue of pines to that twittering that told of the moor-hen's splashings. The sun came up over the eastward tundra at that moment and followed him. He found the water, a stream that meandered southward toward the mountains, and sat down on its snow-covered bank.

He was half-frozen already with his walking through that snow, but the cleansing of his feet at once was imperative. He set to work with handfuls of ice-cold water. Several times he felt he was about to faint in the spasms of agony that traveled up his body. Clair's voice spoke behind him.

"Keith! Why didn't you ask me to help?"

He looked over his shoulder and saw her shivering behind him and carrying the bearskin. "Go back to the fire."

"Don't bully. We'll go when you're all right again. Sit on this and I'll bathe them."

He rose and then sat down, as she had told him. And then she saw a curious thing. His black hair was almost ashen gray. She stared at it appalled, half-kneeling in front of him and looking up. Sinclair said, "What is it?"

"Your hair."

"My what?"

Of course he didn't know. She hesitated, beginning to lave his feet. He scowled at her inquiringly. He put up his hand to his head. "Seems all right."

"It's turned gray," said Clair gently.

"What!"

He was astounded for a moment. He laughed. He muttered something unkind about the influence of Hollywood and was palpably ashamed of himself. But Clair kept her head down-bent. Had he been through as bad a time as that? Hers had been nothing to it. Of course he had thought her lost for ever, killed most probably. . . . His feet made her shudder, and he shuddered himself as she tended them and drew out long slivers of stone from one.

"That was from the time I had a slip and glissade on those infernal red hills."

"If only we had something to bind up the cuts with—"

"I'll make sandals from part of this bearskin. That'll do, thanks. Let's get back to the fire."

At the fire Clair knelt and toasted herself and more of the mammoth meat. Sinclair made his moccasins.

"How did you find me?" Clair asked him.

"God knows. How did you get lost?"

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SHE told him of the circumstances the while the day brightened; then heard of his own Odyssey. Her absence had not been discovered by him until the afternoon of the day on which she had been lost. He had hunted from group to group, asking about her and finding her nowhere.

Presently the whole camp was aroused and, excepting those Cro-Magnard engaged in the bucaning of the mammoth-meat, every hunter and woman had set out in the search for her.

From one of the hunters the American heard of Clair's joining the party which had made a dash through the hills to intercept the second mammoth. Thereat, in company with Aerte and three or four more, he had set out to retraverse that route. In a muddy patch on the other side of these hills, he had come on the imprint of a recent footstep which he knew was Clair's.

"How did you know?"

From the arching of the instep. There had been no more than that single footprint, but it had pointed southward, toward a range of hills. He had set out to reach that range.

The range had been gained as the darkness was falling, and with no further sign of Clair, nor sound of her or answer to his shouts. He had hunted the range all the night, and with the coming of morning had gained the top of it and considered the situation, deciding correctly that if Clair lost were still Clair alive she must have determined to make the southward mountains in the hope of intercepting the trek of the Cro-Magnards. So he himself had set out in the direction of the nameless Alps and—then he had heard her hail him.

She said: "We've always been cut apart and strangers in some way, Keith. Why did you do it?—all this tremendous search for me?"

He had made the moccasins by then and was fitting them to his feet with gut as string. He looked across the savanna to the mountains.

"Any of the hunters would have done it. Aerte is probably searching for you still."

"Yes, I know. But we are different. So why?"

He said in a very still, strained voice: "It's because I love you, I suppose. And there isn't any supposing about it. It's just that."

She stared into the fire. "And I love you also. I think I always loved you. From that day I saw you on the gallery of the *Magellan*. Remember it—twenty-five thousand years ago? Oh, Keith!"

He dropped the moccasins and came toward her, gray-haired, his eyes alight. She shook her head. She spoke in a whisper. "But there's still Aerte—my promised husband for the dark days."

"Eh?"

"There's still him. We've still got to find the hunters again, and there's still Aerte. He's as remote and impossible as a boy in a fairy-tale. But I'm his and he's mine for the dark days at least. I thought you were Aerte last night. I could have sworn you were."

He sat down again. He said, "It's damned nonsense."

"I know."

"Aerte will make no claim on you if you come to me."

"No, he won't. But that's the point, Keith. Oh, my dear, don't you see? It's for-you and your sake and the sake of your dream that I must keep by Aerte. Unless you've given that up? Are we to look for the hunters again?"

He nodded south toward the mountains. His face had the savage sulkiness of repressed wrath she remembered from the days of crossing the upland plateau. "We'll go on and wait their coming there. Even if they don't go farther than this stretch of country we'll be able to see them and return to them."

"But you want them to go farther? You're going to lead them south of the mountains and find a river and plant corn and teach them to build houses and cast metals? Remember? You and I are going to change the course of history there, somewhere beyond these Alps. Do you think we can do it without keeping faith in every detail with the hunters? They'd laugh and say nothing and only pity Aerte a little, but they'd never take counsel from you again."

Sinclair sat down and completed the binding of his footwear. Clair laughed, a little shakily.

"It's me or the future of history, Keith! . . . And don't leave it to me now, else I'll forget that other lover of mine who died on the wire in France, and I'll forget all the black oppressions done in this wild world under the sun, and think only of you, and the dearness and adorableness of your dear surly head and the heart-breaking miracle of that gray hair of yours and its soft lie on your head, and

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the loveliness of that clean, crude, splendid mind of yours. I'll remember only these things—and you'll never forget the others, though all our lives together you'd pretend you had forgotten them."

He said: "I think you've cured me. Bless you. We'll go south and await the coming of Aerte and the hunters."

"OH, that light last night. I forgot to mention it."

"Eh?"

They were on the road to the southern mountains, though no road had ever crossed that wild belt of land. It was past noon. Here and there the snow still lay in patches, or shivered and wilted into slush pools under the heat of the sun. And over all the landscape was a steaming haze that rose a little, but patched the ground in great areas to indistinctness.

They had crossed a good eight or nine miles of country since leaving the encampment of the night before. Now the mountains before them changed shape continually, but visibly grew greater. They towered as tower the walls to the Colorado Canyon from river-bed level. Crowned with snow, the great massif stretched from horizon to horizon, with in front, leftward, an extended arm, a crazy jumble of broken peaklets and poised glacierettes. It was somewhere in that extended arm, Clair thought, that she had seen the light.

Sinclair scowled down at her questioningly. "Light? What kind of light?"

She put her arm through his. "Funny how that scowl of yours used almost to intimidate me! . . . Fun to be alive, isn't it, Keith?"

The scowl went from his face. He pinched her shoulder absently. Then:

"The light?"

"Oh, yes. It was like a camp-fire."

"Couldn't be. At least, I don't think so. The hunters have no story of other groups living so comparatively near."

Some half-memory vexed her mind. She could not secure it. "But there might be."

"I don't know." They passed into a winding trackway made by beasts, between two stretches of marsh, and climbed up from that low patch to firmer ground, a re-beginning of the savanna-land and dotted with deer and auroch herds. "There might be, but on the whole I doubt it. Our hunters are perhaps as yet the only human beings in Atlantis—perhaps in all the world."

She found that a breath-taking notion. "But there were other peoples in prehistory besides the Cro-Magnards."

"Later, yes. But at this epoch? Mayn't the others have been helped into full humanity by imitation of our proto-Cro-Magnards? . . . We can't say. But all these things are accidental, dependent on a multitude of chances that might arise in one district and nowhere else. Perhaps in the world at the moment there are only tribes of submen at various levels, and our hunters constitute the only group that has as yet emerged into full humanity."

"Then—"

He smiled down into her grave face. Clair looked back at the land behind them.

"Any accident changes the nature of things forever. If our Cro-Magnards were suddenly wiped out—"

"There might never be such a thing as history. At least—we can never know."

"Oh, the awful loneliness of men! They couldn't help making gods when they found some shelter and security in an agricultural society . . . Pious rotten romanticism, Keith—remember what you once told me I was addicted to?—but that night I was lost on the hills back there I began to think that perhaps there was some God after all. Not just a god. Something, Some One. . . ."

She looked up at him. Thousands and thousands were yet to look up into the faces of their fellows for confirmation of that wild hope. . . . He said: "An honest god's the noblest work of man. I don't believe there's anything to shield us from the darkness, Clair. And not even for the sake of poetry do I think we should carry the idea to our hunters in that world we're to make beyond these mountains. . . . If we ever get beyond them."

"Tremendous things, aren't they?"

They were. Somewhere at the foot of their slopes, however, the Cro-Magnards would arrive in time, and there was nothing for the two of them but to press on and await that arrival.

Clair said, being dragged out of a squelchy, boggy place: "The light—we never settled about that."

"No." Sinclair, assisting her to her feet, abruptly pulled her down again and lay prone himself. "But we can now, I think."

Clair, her breath shaken from her, wriggled out of his grasp and looked in the direction in which he pointed.

The tapering tip of the northward spur

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of the mountain range was already a sierraed toweringness to the left of them. It was not more than three miles away. The forests climbed its base in green attack, even skirmished remotely up into valleys and ledges of the heights. That for background, with directly south the still remoter, more gigantic background of the range proper, a good six miles away.

Here and there, in the angle so formed, grew clumps of larch and fir and great stretches of gorse. Amid these fed the herds of aurochs Clair had noted before. One herd was very close—a herd that had ceased to feed and stood on the qui vive, bulls with gigantic tails uplifted, cows and calves sniffing the air. And the reason for the alarm—a dozen of reasons—became at length obtrusive to Clair's gaze.

They were less than a quarter of a mile away, but had remained unperceived by her because of their dull gray coloring. It seemed to her that it was on all fours they were creeping from bush to bush, nearer their quarry, the aurochs. But indeed it was merely that their arms were so elongated as naturally to reach the ground. Across cavernous, hair-matted torsos were strapped crude skin-wrappings. From each pair of shoulders, on a short squat neck, a strange deformed head, chinless, browless, enormously eye-ridged, projected forward so that the Thing could never look directly upward. Even at that distance they were horrible, dreadful and awful caricatures of familiar lovely things.

Clair whispered. "What are they?"

"Neanderthalers," said Sinclair, also in a whisper.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

ALL OUR YESTERDAYS

NO SNOW fell that night, but a bitter wind sprang up with the coming of darkness and blew into the great triangular space formed by the forest lines and the bastions of the unknown mountain ranges. At first the darkness, for there came neither moon- nor star-rise, was heavy and complete, without even the usual brooding Atlantean grayness. And then, as if lighted one by one, there became obvious far in the base of the triangle and ranging up northward toward the open country the glare of great fires.

Sinclair and Clair saw them pringling brightly in the night, from their own camping-place in the heart of a thicket of broom-plants and larch. They also had kindled a fire, dangerous though that procedure might be; they had kindled it midway the thicket, however, so that there was little chance of those alien fire-tenders seeing it. But both, after they had eaten, went out to the verge of thicket to watch that bright sentineling of the mountain-base. Sinclair stood with his arm round Clair, and pulled her back into the thicket to still her shivering.

"Then they can make fires—they are men," she said.

"They are men, but not Man. They are the sub-human species that are almost men, and are to be in occupation of most of Europe when our Cro-Magnards wander there thousands of years hence. If they do so wander."

The fires burned steadily. Clair remembered the creeping beasts of the afternoon and shuddered with disgust. Yet perhaps that was unreasonable enough. Perhaps there was nothing of savagery about them, any more than among the Cro-Magnards.

She saw the dim shake of Sinclair's gray head.

"Their conduct didn't warrant it. Men—the Cro-Magnards and the stock that produced ourselves—are decent, kindly animals of anthropoid blood, like the chimpanzee and gibbon. But there is another strain—the gorilla and perhaps these Neanderthalers—the sullen individualist beast whose ferocity is perhaps maladjustment of body and an odd black resentment against life."

"Like the Militarists and the hanging judges and the gloomy deans of the twentieth century?"

"Exactly." But his voice sounded absent. "I wonder. . . . Look here, go back to the fire. I'm going out to see what they're really like."

"What?" She was startled enough at that. "Then I'll come as well."

"Can't. One of us must go, Clair, and must take the bearskin for covering against this infernal wind. And it must be me. I'm stronger than you are and I can run faster."

"But why must? We needn't go near them at all."

"We must because our hunters will be down from the north in the next day or so, and there's no telling what will happen then. If they're peaceable or cow-

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ardly beasts there's nothing to fear. If not—"

"But we needn't lead the Cro-Magnards anywhere near them. We can take them through the mountains away over there, somewhere." She pointed to the right in the westward darkness.

"Can we? I wonder. . . I must go, Clair."

She said, standing beside the fire and helping him to tie the bearskin: "Do take care of yourself, my dear." And thought, "As though we were in Kensington and I was telling him to mind the buses on the way to the office!"

He said, absently still, "I'll do that." Then he picked up his spear, and put his hand on her shoulder and gave it a little shake, and went off into the darkness.

Clair built up the fire and lay down in the shelter of the break-wind. She took her own spear beside her for company and Sinclair's bow as well, though she knew nothing of the handling of the thing. It was a very lonely vigil. The fire fluffed and rose and fell occasionally in eddies of the wind. But presently that wind died away almost completely, though the cold seemed to grow intenser still. Clair thought, "I must not think of Sinclair," and put him out of her thoughts as well as she might, and curled her legs up beneath her, and remembered some picture of a Tierra del Fuegan savage she had once seen in that attitude.

She thought, startled, "Goodness, I might have sat as the artist's model."

Where were Aerte and the hunters?

Something bayed close at hand beyond the bushes. There came a distant scuffling; nearer, the swift scurry of running paws. The scurry ceased. Then a *pad-pad-padding* began in a circle, just beyond the range of the fire-glow. Clair, with a very dry throat, stirred the fire and in its increase of radiance saw that she was surrounded by a pack of wolves —beasts with long feathery brushes and brightly erected ears.

Each might have been of the bigness of an Alsarian. Sometimes they sat and rested, staring at her, at other times resumed that scurrying encirclement of the fire. It was difficult to realize that if they overcame fear of the fire they could eat her, sink those bright teeth into her legs and throat and stomach, very agonizingly, in a flounder of hot and stench-laden bodies. . . .

Clair got to her feet once and waved her spear at a great cadaverous brute. He stopped in his pacing, head brightly alert, and cocked his ears. Then, as though grinning sardonically, he bared his teeth, growled and advanced a step or so. Clair stirred the fire again, and he retreated.

So the night went on. Clair, sitting dozing once, awoke to find—not the beasts upon her as she had dreamed—and dreaming had awoke with a startled cry—but them gone and the fire burned very low, and herself very cold. She fed the smolder hurriedly, carefully. A mammoth trumpeted, southward, in some glen of the mountains, the sound eery and plaintive.

The clouds began to clear and presently, with a faint spraying of powdery light, the star-rise came. The heavens were filled with an eastward sailing of great masses of dark storm-clouds. Clair sat and warmed herself and got up and walked about and sat down again. Still Sinclair did not return.

There came a breath of dawn through the air of the darkness. The stars grew brighter and then faded. And through the dawn Sinclair came back. She heard him calling in the distance, "Clair! Clair!" and ran and found him.

He had been *lost.*

"MOST infernally lost." He was splashed with mud and rimed with frost. His eyebrows and eyelids curled white with frost. He sat down jerkily by the fire and started up again, glancing over his shoulder. "Idiotic to shout, but there was nothing else to be done. I hadn't a notion of where you were. Lost my way completely coming back—as I might have guessed I'd do. . . . Old habit of thinking of the lie of a country in terms of roads and sign-posts. . . . Wonder if they heard me shouting?"

"I'll go and see," Clair said.

He pulled her down beside him. "Not that, anyway," he said grimly. "Let's listen."

They listened to that austere world of the Third Interglacial awakening with the coming of the morning over the Atlantean savanna. Sparrows chirped in the trees. Somewhere in the depths of the wood a corn-crake was sounding its note. Spite the nearing of the sun, it was still bitterly cold. But there was no crackling of the undergrowth under coming feet.

"What are they like?" Clair whispered.

"God. . . . Awful."

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He said no more than that about them. Instead, he shivered. Clair cut meat from their dwindling supply and grilled it. Sinclair was nodding from lack of sleep. She asked: "Did you get near them?"

"I lay above one of their caves. I seemed to lie there for hours. Limestone spur, that, and its upper tip here is honeycombed with caves. There must be several hundreds of them. Ugh!"

She ruffled his gray hair. "Don't think of them or speak about them for a bit. Do you think I could use your bow?"

"Why?"

She looked wistfully through the trees toward the sound of the forest fowls. "I would like chicken for a change."

He smiled at her from a face as gray as his hair. "Try. But don't go too far. And if you see—any of them—scream like hell and run back in this direction."

She went through the morning-stirred forest, thinking, at first almost in a panic, "I had to get away. . . . Keith, my dear, you've had the devil of a night. Will it pass or are you really ill? . . . Oh, *damn* this thing."

She stopped and disentangled the bow from a bush, and hurried on again because of the coldness. She came to the edge of a clearing. In the charred forest-litter two birds fed, perkily, with quick-darting heads. Partridges. She thought: "I'll never hit them," and stopped, and planted the butt of the bow in the ground, and fitted the clumsy arrow. One of the birds saw her and raised its head, regarding her sidewise, out of a bright questioning eye. Her fingers fumbled frozenly at the bow-string. "The damn bird imagines it's having its photograph taken. . . ."

Now.

The arrow whizzed across the space, an enormous lance of a projectile. One partridge rose with a flirr! The other lay impaled wing from wing, and fluttering wildly. Clair wrung its neck and tried to get out the arrow, and desisted, lest she snap off the insecure flint; and went back toward Sinclair and the camp-fire. The break-wind shelter was deserted. She dropped the bird and ran through the trees toward the open country that led to the Neanderthal caves.

Sinclair turned about as he heard her coming.

"Sh! For God's sake!"

The great triangle was evidently the hunting ground of the beast-men. Three separate parties, none of them near enough for the intimate study of individuals, were debouching in various directions from that far mountain-wall—one party apparently heading in the direction of their shelter. A little over two miles away, Clair judged it. Sinclair swore, ruffling his bearded chin.

"Are they on my track—or is it just a chance drift after game?"

Clair stared with him. He gave a sigh of relief. "A chance party, after all. They're just on the prowl."

"Are they? They're not coming in a straight line, but they seem to be following something. Didn't you lose yourself last night? Perhaps they're following your—"

"By God, they are!"

ALL that forenoon they fled westward and southwestward, the gray beasts behind them. Sinclair's own running abilities might have outdistanced them with ease, but Clair needed frequent rest. Once or twice, reaching the foot of one or other of the rolling inclines in which the land ebbed and flowed, they would glance up and see their pursuers at the summit, sometimes less than a quarter of a mile distant. On flat country that distance grew greater: the Neanderthalers were at a disadvantage on the plain. Once when a good mile and a half separated them, Clair, lying panting on the ground, asked:

"Shouldn't we strike north? We'd meet Aerte and the hunters."

Sinclair himself lay and breathed in great gasps, watching that loping, crouched-forward trot of the beast-men. "We might miss them completely. Perhaps they're already much nearer the mountains than we've supposed. Anyhow, they'll descend farther to the west than this, I think. . . . Rested?"

"Goodness, no." She looked at him, white-faced, and smiled. "If only I'd had training as a charwoman instead of as a novelist!"

"You don't do badly." He stood up. A long guttural wail came down the air from the beast-men. "I think they don't like us."

"Mean of them."

Funny how one could push the horror back with a remark like that. . . . But they followed on behind, doggedly enough, the horrors. Clair, running stripped and unshod, carried nothing but the light spear she had brought from the far northern camp of the Cro-Magnards.

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Sinclair had tied to his back both the bearskin, now enwrapping the slain partridge, and his bow and arrows. His feet were still in their moccasins, and from the bloody tracks left behind by his companion he could see that without such aids Clair herself was hardly capable of keeping the pace for long. Running beside her, he glanced at her face, red-flushed, a very sweet and kind and comely face even in this desperate hour. And again he thought, wonderingly and inadequately, "Pretty thing!"

Open country they had come to then. But the Neanderthalers seemed tireless. Sinclair lookd back to see them not more than half a mile away. Strange—that tenacity of pursuit. Did they recognize Clair and himself as kindred animals, to be killed as freaks, or did they seem just desirable and tirable meat? God, what an end to the business!

Messy end, too. For Clair—? Not to be thought of.

But it had to be thought of. He said: "If they overtake us, Clair, I'll kill you. That'll be best. It won't hurt much."

"Oh, don't be a fool!"

He almost sulked, and grinned wryly at the recurrence of his ancient short-temper. Clair flung herself to the ground again.

"Can't go farther—yet. Sorry I said that, Keith. But you are a fool to suggest these melodramatics, you know. . . . Here, in Atlantis. Stuff out of Victorian novels. . . . And I ought to suggest now that you should leave me and save yourself. Not so silly. Oh, goodness, my heart! . . . We'll just fight it out together. They'll kill both of us."

"Will they?" He stood above her, desperate, looking backward.

"Of course they will. Oh, because I'm a woman? I'll seem just as repulsive to them as they do to us. . . . How far?"

"Very near now."

He had unslung his bow. Clair scrambled to her knees. The beast-men were quite close, running with lowered heads and trailing fringes of body-hair, their knuckles touching the ground at every forward swing of their bodies, in their hands great shapeless mallets of stone, mounted on rude wooden hafts. Sinclair knelt on one knee. The bow-string sang like a plucked guitar.

A Neanderthaler to the left—not one Sinclair had aimed at—received the arrow in his chest, almost in the region of the heart. The brute screamed horribly, and its companions, swaying and lurching, halted.

The beast plucked stupidly at the arrow, and then bent its head and bit the thing clean off where the shaft entered its chest. Then it suddenly crumpled, as though some support had been withdrawn. Sinclair loosed his second arrow, glanced after it not at all, but heard its thud in flesh and the succeeding howl; and dragged Clair to her feet.

"Try again."

They ran hand in hand toward the near belt of forest.

Clair felt her lungs bursting. A red mist played before her eyes. Twice she tripped, and Sinclair, savagely, jerked her to her feet again. Again and again the earth seemed to rise up toward her. Sinclair's grasp on her hand suddenly eased. She heard his voice far off.

"Done all we can. Sit down, my dear."

She fell rather than sat, and put her hands to throbbing ear-drums. Sinclair gave a shout.

"Impossible! . . . They've turned!"

Clair swung round at that, resting on her elbows also, looking. The Neanderthalers were in retreat, carrying the dead body. One of them went with limp-swinging arm, blood-dripping. Every now and then he bent to bite at the arm. Clair stared stupidly.

"They're going."

He lay beside her, almost exhausted as he was.

"Looks like it."

THEY had neither the will nor the breath to say more at the moment. Meantime the Neanderthalers, without a backward glance, shambled across the savanna, topped a low rise and disappeared into the jungle wilderness in the direction of the northern spur. It was past noon. Still there was no sunlight and still it blew as harshly as during the night. Sinclair, with a driving headache, sat erect.

"Can't stay here. Die of cold after the heat of that run. I'll leave you the bearskin and go and make a fire over there."

Clair sat up also. She had the pocked gray face of a woman of fifty. "I'll come. I can manage."

Somehow they helped each other to the forest-fringe—great beeches standing with shrill whistling boughs. But farther in were more larch, and then a wide grove of stone-oaks. Beyond these: more evergreens, then a wide glade and open

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country once more. It was no forest, as they had imagined from the east, but only a long straggling plantation of Nature's planting.

Through the glade the open country to the west showed up as differing in no great degree from the stretches they had already traversed. They dropped to earth by a little stream meandering amid the tree-roots—an indifferent little stream crooning in an absorbed contentment—and drank ice-cold water which instantly gave Clair cramp. Sinclair picked her up and carried her under a larch near by.

"Stick it. I'll have a fire in a minute."

It seemed to Clair an unending minute. Then she was conscious of warmth and of Sinclair kneeling, massaging her. He had the fire kindled and crackling. The grayness had gone from his face, and, incidentally, from her own.

"Feel better?"

"Leagues. Goodness"—she looked up at him in the gay, ironic self-appraisal that survived the *Magellan,* clothes, comfort and seemingly every conceivable contingency—"*and* hungry!"

"I know. So'm I. Nothing like a run in the Neanderthal Stakes for an appetite. I'm roasting your partridge."

It smelled savory enough. Clair sat up and assisted. They sat side by side, and despite her hunger and her recovery she still felt weak, and leaned her head comfortably on Sinclair's shoulder.

"Adam and Eve."

He smiled at her, his face remarkable un-dour. "Or the Babes in the Wood."

She dozed a little. So did Sinclair. Then their heads knocked together and they started awake. The smell of singeing partridge filled the air. Clair shook herself.

"Shockingly selfish again. It's you who've a right to be sleepy. Rest when we've had lunch."

"I will. I'm almost all in."

They ate nearly all the partridge. It was very good. Sinclair, lying down and closing his eyes, nevertheless did so with a mental reservation. He would keep awake and get up in a short time and make her take his place. . . . He looked at her from below half-closed eyelids that each seemed to weigh a ton. God, if the Neanderthalers. . . .

Infernal to die and never see Clair again, never hear her deep, enjoyable and enjoying laughter; or see that bright naive puzzling glance of hers. Infernal to have died and never held her in your arms and kissed her, as she deserves to be kissed. As you want to kiss her and she wants. . . .

Never see the Cro-Magnards again, perhaps. We'll go west, far off, and find a passage through the south mountains together, and build a house next spring. Together ourselves. Together. . . .

Clair's voice raised in excitement, her hand shaking him. "Keith—oh, Keith, our hunters!"

HE had slept for perhaps a couple of hours, in spite of his resolution. He sat up with a start and looked round scowlingly. "The hunters?"

"I'm sure they are. Away over there by that cramped little wood."

He saw them then. "The hunters right enough." His voice was oddly unglad. "Still on the trek, too."

They had debouched from the wood that Clair thought of as cramped. They were specks in distance, but speck-men, not the strange beasts of Neanderthal. They straggled southward in happy-go-lucky migration, moving slowly, proving they had no lack of food at least at the moment.

Sinclair got to his feet stiffly.

"No more Neanderthalers, anyhow. And you'll find Aerte again."

"I needn't. We need never find any of them."

He started: "You've thought that?"

"And you?"

He nodded. Clair said slowly:

"We could hide from them and wait till they pass. We could go south beyond the mountains, and start a Golden Age of our own. We could be happier than was ever possible in the world—before or after. . . . And we'd be ashamed of ourselves all our lives."

He found a wry gibe: "'Stern daughter of the voice of God!'"

She laughed pitifully, looking out at the nearing Cro-Magnards. Was ever such a fantastic choice before a man and woman? Sinclair wondered. And wondering, he knew there was no choice, neither for himself nor for Clair.

For she brought out of that dim twentieth century of three weeks ago the memory of her boy fiancé who had screamed away a night of agony beyond the parapets of Mametz; and he—he had brought memories kin enough to hers, dying soldiers and starving miners, the Morlocks of the pits. . . . Clair seemed to have read his thoughts.

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"We're both playing, Keith, and we know it. Let's go out to them." She turned away, and then turned back resolutely. "But you'd like to kiss me first!"

When he had finished with that they went out across the cold knee-length grass, laden as they had arrived. The whole migration of the hunters paused, in straggling, shimmering lines in the cold gold light of the afternoon. And then there came a shout.

They had been recognized.

Clair had been lost and she was found. She felt no repulsion toward Aerte. Only pity. Sinclair had gone back to his place by the fire of Aitz-kore, the flint-knapper. Life went on—even life in a dream in winter-threatened Atlantis.

Life went on. . . .

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

NOW SLEEPS THE CRIMSON PETAL

AND the unaccustomed cold grew ever more intense. Day came and brought no lightening of that burden. Instead, it brought generally sharp showers of hail in the morning hours and at noon the scurry of a snow-blizzard from the northwest. It was weather of a severity the hunters had never known before in all the long days of their residence in the painted caves of the north.

Stumbling campward at evening both hunters and Sinclair's scouts would come on the bodies of their fellows lying frozen and naked in places where exhaustion had overtaken them. Winter had come to Atlantis—a foretaste of that winter that was gradually creeping down on all the northern hemisphere, presently to crystallize into the spreading glaciers and the long silences of the Fourth Ice Age.

Game grew ever scarcer. The herds went west and disappeared, and the hunters might have trailed in pursuit but for the alien presence of Sinclair in their midst. Hence the scouts that day after day went out under his direction, puzzled yet friendly, even though they might never return from such scoutings, any more than those death-frozen comrades of theirs. Game had almost vanished, but packs of the raiding and scavenging carnivora hung around the camp, and at night the fires had to be built to twice the usual height, both in order to scare the wolves and hyaenodon and to counteract the bitter frosts.

On the second day Sinclair himself vanished in early dawn together with two of the strongest and wiriest Cro-Magnards. It did not snow all that day, but to Clair, wandering the camp clad in the bearskin Sinclair had once brought for her protection, it seemed that the cold had again increased. They could not long remain in this place.

Indeed, Aerte had told her that they were to follow the game westward on the morrow. He had no understanding of Sinclair's hesitations. . . . Doubtlessly, however, like other hesitants on other occasions, the White Hunter would follow the main drift of opinion and migration.

Thus, Aerte, the while Clair marveled, chilledly and once again, at these people of the dawn. There was no compulsion, just as there was no acceptance of it. They had grown to know and love Sinclair, perhaps because of that energetic righteousness of his that was so in contrast to their own unhesitating and unswerving kindliness. But he was no magic leader from the void, no story-book hero such as Clair had read of her fellow-authors assigning to the leadership of savage tribes in the pages of many a romance.

Here was truer romance. He was merely one who promised good hunting-grounds and pleasant days beyond the southward mountains—better than they would elsewhere find if they took his advice. Now it was evident that he was mistaken, as a man might be. West or east they must go. The game seemed to have gone west. They would follow it.

That night Sinclair came back with one of his hunters. The other had been lost in a canyon of the southern mountains, the great black-blue wall that dominated the horizons of their world. The American came to Clair while there was still daylight and flung himself down by the fire deserted but for herself.

He was spattered in mud from head to foot, mud that had frozen on him; his arms and legs were scored with long cicatrices. For a little he lay in silence near Clair. She put her hand on his shoulder in that caress that was his own, and he put up his hand to her hand. He said, as if to himself:

"There's no road at all through the southward mountains. It is an absolutely impassable wall. We've climbed and prospected ever since we reached it an hour after daybreak. And the other parties that have gone into the west report the

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same. It's a range that may lie midway across Atlantis. And it curves northward after a bit."

"North?" Clair lay on an elbow and reflected; and suddenly understood. "Then if the hunters go west that will take them into a worse winter. It might even mean—"

"Extinction. These people can not stick things worse than they are at present. And it'll grow worse every hour. The sinking of the northern plateau has done it, of course."

"Then what are we going to do?"

"I don't know. God, how I ache!"

He lay so quiet that she thought he was asleep. But presently he spoke again. "And in the east, beyond that northward-making spur, we know there are leagues and leagues of brackish marsh. Didn't notice them? I did.... That would mean, if we turn the drift east, that we'll have to go far north again to circumvent the marsh, and turn south again. It would mean that hardly a woman or child could survive. Perhaps not any of us.... Remember my Utopia beyond the mountains?" He laughed.

Clair sat and stared at him and the fading of the daylight. There was still food in the camp. There was still the calling of greetings and the flaring of fires, there was still the sight and being of unfearing human life all around them. Southward: impassable. Westward: impassable. In the north: extinction. And then a great light seemed to flash on her:

"But they didn't die, Keith. They went east, somehow, some of them, and escaped this winter. We know it from history, as you've often told me. Our hunters weren't killed. They reached France thousands of years after this."

HE was silent for a little, then he said: "That was in the history we know, not in the history we hope to build."

She put out her hand and shook him again. "Oh, we're playing again, Keith. *How if the history we know is the history we helped to build?* How if when you, twenty-five thousand years away, learned as a student that the Cro-Magnards came into Spain at the end of the Ice Age—how if you were learning about an event which you yourself had helped to fashion?"

"Then I've come back again and can refuse its fashioning this second chance—even if I knew how." He sat up. "And of course—there is perhaps a way!"

"Which?"

He pondered, looking at her and not seeing her, as she knew. "The northward spur to the east is broken off from the main mountain-wall. I saw that on the night I crept out from our camp and went to spy on the Neanderthalers. There's a long hillocky valley lies between. Perhaps half a mile broad, though it seems to climb up to a point at the other side. . . ."

"Keith, you've found the way!"

"By God, I have not! Oh, we're the stuff of dreams, but that's not the dream I'm going to help humanity to dream. We'd crawl through that pass some time at night, so's not to arouse the Neanderthalers, and gain the country in the east. I don't know how many would ever gain it, but some at least. Not me among them, I think. And beyond that pass in the east lies: Your boy fiancé dying on the wire in France, Clair, and the crucified slaves along the Appian Way and the Pinkertons shooting down the starving strikers of a Scotch philanthropist. . . . Not if I know it! Better to end it here. Better to make this the end of the human adventures, or go west with the hunters tomorrow and lose ourselves and die in the clean snows of Atlantis. . . .

"Here's your hunter, Clair. Twenty-five thousands years hence he'll also be a hunter—of human heads in New Guinea, with dried human hands strapped on his chest. Or a gangster in Chicago. Or a Steel Helmet in Germany. Like it?"

Aerte sat down beside them. He looked from one to the other with puzzled eyes. Clair smiled at him, this child who loved her. She said: "I never had a classical education, but wasn't there some tag: 'They made a desert and they call it peace'?"

Sinclair said nothing, standing up and looking into the darkness west. She knew she was pleading for something immeasurably greater than herself. She could find no words but that seemed trite and pitiable ones.

"There were other people than the head-hunter and the gangster.... There was Karl Liebknecht; there was Anatole France. There was even yourself in that age of which we came. There was I."

He turned back at that. She saw more than a bitter denial in his face now. She looked at Aerte and some one other than herself spoke through her lips:

"Do you think they ever quite beat us, Keith—the beasts of civilization? Do

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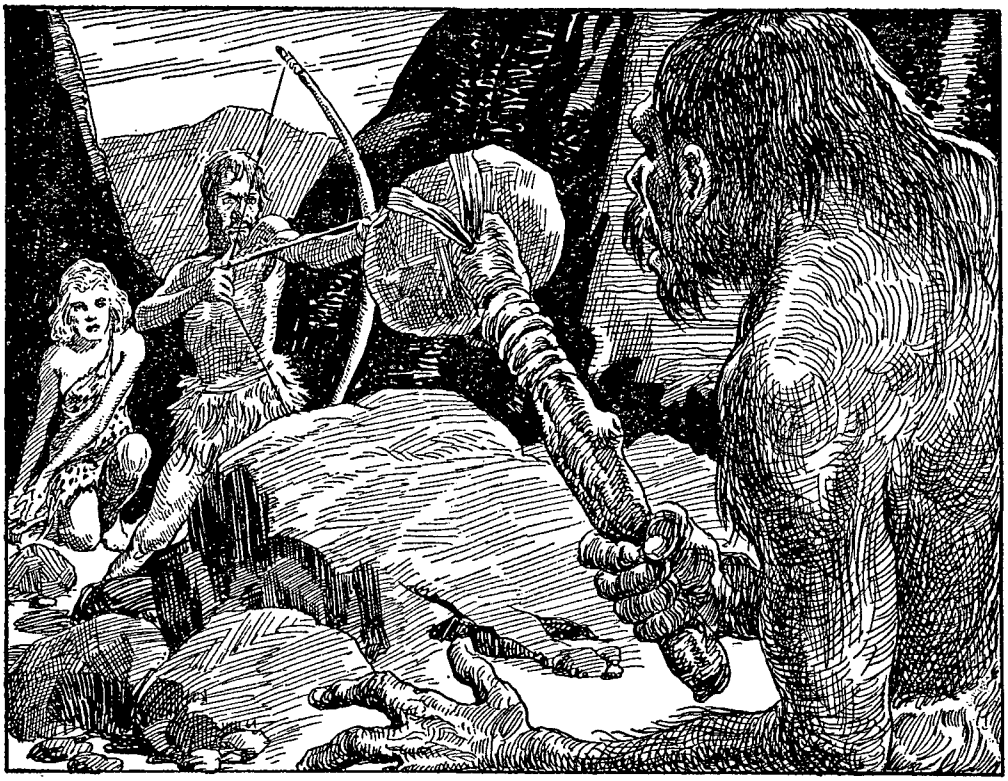

Sinclair's bowstring tightened as the Neanderthaler approached

you think that Aerte ever quite died, away there in those years? Do you think he won't beat them when civilization has passed and finished? Remember Sir John?—The hunter will come again in the world we left! You and I and thousands of others were fighting up from the fears and cruelties of civilization to look at the world through his eyes again.

"There are later ages than the one we came from, and Aerte—he'll walk across the world again, and fearless, but with Orion's sword in his belt and the Milky Way for a plaything. The moaning and the tears—they're a darkness yet to fall on our hunters. But it will pass. I know. You know it will. And it is for that, though your own dream of changing that chance must finish, that you are to lead the Cro-Magnards east to the pass in the mountain-wall."

She could not see when she stopped speaking. She thought: "Oh! I ache also, and I'm cold and hungry, and I've been ranting. . . . And I'd like to lie down and sleep and sleep and forget it all—" She heard Sinclair speaking, and looked up and saw that Titan resentment gone, from his face.

"You've won again, Clair. There was you, at least, in that age that is not yet. . . . We'll go east tomorrow."

AT dawn the next morning the Cro-Magnards moved out from their camp and stood up the line of march to the east. In front Sinclair and his surviving scout vanished beforehand. Clair marched midway the migration in the company of a girl, Lizair, who had adopted her after the death of Zumarr; it was the same girl who had refused her first suitor in the time of the mating for the dark days.

Now the boy whom she had chosen walked beside them. Aerte had gone off with a band of other hunters to forage northward for game with which to feed the migration.

No sun came, but a pale diffusion of saffron light in the east. The wind had died away again, but beyond the forest

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belt to the verge of which the Neanderthalers had pursued Clair and Sinclair, the Cro-Magnards saw the rolling savanna country pelted with flying showers of sleet.

Here, also, the snow lay deeper than in the higher country from which they had descended, and the trek, a gray trek in a gray country, moved slowly enough in the direction set by Sinclair the night before. Children wailed ceaselessly in the piercing chill. Behind, as Clair could see looking back, there followed pack on pack of wolves, black hordes of skulking raiders which grew ever bolder as the day wore on.

Clair tramped half that day like one in a dream. And in a dream she saw the country close in and open out before them; she was hazily conscious of the passing bombardments of sleet; once of a thunderstorm and a great flare of lightning that played over a wood where they halted somewhere toward midday and ate cooked or raw flesh brought with them, for Sinclair had told them to light no fires.

It was there that the girl Lizair began to cough and cough in ever-increasing spasms, until she was coughing blood, and in a little while was dead. They left her there, and others, and the wolves halted for a little time, and then came on again.

Clair could not bear to look at the boy who'd chosen Lizair.

The northward spur, not more than five miles or so away, was reddened with the colors of the sunset when Sinclair and his scout fell back on the main body of the trek. Clair was told of their coming and managed to urge her half-frozen limbs to carry her to the front of the march. As she did so the march gradually turned aside, to the south, making another small wood. Sinclair had advised a halt.

She found him at last, Aitz-kore and a group of other Cro-Magnards about him. They were at the farther verge of the wood in which the trek had halted, and in the hearing of the long, easy agglutinative role of the proto-Basque speech she stood for a while puzzled and unnoticed. Then she heard her name mentioned, and saw Sinclair's face lighten. She went forward and touched his arm then.

He held her in his arms then, while the hunters with troubled eyes looked at them. "How are you?"

She was weak enough to want to sob, but she did not. "Getting weaker and wiser, as the rabbit said when the dog was eating it. . . . I'm lasting, but there have been awful things back there, Keith."

"I've heard. It can't be helped. We must just go on."

"Can we?"

He indicated the open country in front of them. It was the triangle of the Neanderthalers, and apparently quite deserted. "That other chap and I have been watching the place ever since we arrived early this forenoon. There's been no one out on it, and no sign of any of the beast-men stirring, even over by the spur."

Clair peered through the intervening distances. She saw, after a little, lighter patches in the face of the cliff, and in that clear, generally untainted air, there was the ghost of a sharp, blue odor.

"Aren't those their fires?"

"Yes. But they don't seem to be moving out of the caves. Probably they have plenty of food and will continue to keep inside as they have done all through the daylight. We'll strike south as soon as the darkness comes and wait on the lee of the mountain-wall for the stars—if there are any. Can move farther in pitch blackness. Then we'll cross and push up through the valley."

"If there's fighting—what will happen?"

"God knows. Our hunters have never fought anything but beasts. They can't conceive a human enemy. It would all depend if they were to find the Neanderthalers human or bestial. . . . We won't have any need to put it to the test, I think. . . . Go and help keep every one on the move or interested, Clair. No fires. . . . Eh?"

She gave a litle ghost of a laugh. "'While shepherds watched their flocks by night'—I never thought I'd play the rôle. I wish we could sing."

"What would you sing?"

"Something comforting."

"Do, then; but not too loud. It'll keep the hunters interested."

She had never thought of singing to them before. They had no songs of the European type, with sharp rhymes and mechanical spacings. But they came round about, from the grayness of the trees, in some numbers as she began to sing, her voice a little hoarse, for she shivered still, but as sweet and sensuous as it had ever been. Sinclair, standing

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still watching the Neanderthaler fires, heard her voice.

"Abide with me,"

Clair sang,

"Fast falls the eventide,
The darkness deepens,
Lord, with me abide."

Clair's God beyond the gods. . . .

THE wind rose again. The last of the daylight lingered sharply, on pinpoints of the strange world in the beginning of history, and Sinclair's eyes, in a sudden passion of knowledge of how little of this world he had ever made deep acquaintance with, went from point to point as these rear-guards of the day quenched their lamps and departed. Clair sang on, a new song now, inexpressibly alien in that wild land:

"Now sleeps the crimson petal, now the white;
Now waves the cypress in the palace walk;
Now sinks the gold fish in the porphyry font;
The firefly wakens: waken thou with me.
Now droops the milk-white peacock like a ghost,
And like a ghost she glimmers unto me.
Now lies the Earth all Danae to the stars,
And all thy heart lies open unto me.

He looked up at the sky. It was pall-black. He moved and stamped frozen feet, thinking: "I'll have frost-bite soon. And Clair—better not think of her. Of nothing but the pass. God, if only there will be starshine!"

He waited while he counted a thousand, and then moved through the darkness of the trees, speaking to the hunters and women. They must walk four or five abreast and follow after him. He heard their pleasant singsong of response, though many of their faces he could not see, and turned about, and called that he was ready, and held out gingerly southward on the track he had mentaly plotted while the daylight lasted. He held his spear extended, and groped the path with it.

He thought, "Rotten show if the wolves attack," and put that out of his mind also. One thing at a time. . . .

Beyond the wood the wind smote them as with keen-edged knives. Sinclair gasped, and steadied himself, and plodded forward. Behind, he heard the scuffle of the migration, and looking over his shoulder could see the lighter shadows that were the bodies of the frontward Cro-Magnards. One slipped forward to his side and kept pace with him. Sinclair said: "Who are you?"

"I am Aerte."

"You had better go back to Clair and guard her. I can lead the way."

Aerte, the Atlantean child-man whom he had never been able to detest, whom even in bitterest moments he had never regarded with other than a gray acquiescence, remained at his shoulder. "Clair sent me here."

So that was that. . . .

Once the wolves behind did verily attack, and the whole column swayed and eddied while the rearward hunters turned about and fought and stabbed at the leaping bodies in the darkness. They did it with little noise, and the beasts drew off again. But they took with them the bodies of some half-dozen, half-grown children. Nothing could be done for these, and some hunters also did not return. The march through the darkness went on.

"We're going into something twice as bad as we've had to face in the last hour; and I'll want your help," Sinclair told her.

She did. The American said: "I want you to walk midway the column. Talk to the people round about you. Explain just what I'm doing, and why they must make no noise. Aerte's going to do the same at the rear."

"But I can't talk their language!"

"Lord. I'd forgotten that."

"We're turning toward the valley, now?"

"Yes. It's grown a little lighter." His fingers touched hers awkwardly. "Good luck!"

She would have called him back; but he had gone. In another moment, slowly, in a light that gradually increased with the coming of the star-rise through the frost, the trek was again in motion. In their changed direction the wind blew not behind them now, but on their left. And suddenly, pricking out the bastions of the northward mountain-spur, seen as they rose to the higher ground that led to that spur, there shone bright and splendid the fires of the Neanderthal caves.

A murmur arose from the Cro-Magnards, but died away at the urgings of Sinclair and Aerte. Over there was danger, no food or help. They must still even the crying of the babies.

The fires seemed to Clair to draw near-

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er in leaps and bounds. They were fires remote in caves, however; there were no signs of watchers. Right ahead, where the column wound into the presumed valley, was unspotted darkness.

Clair became aware of the fires passing on her left. They had entered the valley. They stumbled up over rocky ground. Clair raised her head once and saw the rocky heavens, unclouded, banded with the glory of the Milky Way.

And then presently another line of fires gleamed directly ahead, a strange, wild moaning filled the air, and above it rose shout on shout—shouting in Sinclair's voice!

The migratory column of the Cro-Magnards was being attacked at a dozen points by the Neanderthalers of the unsuspected valley caves.

THAT had been hours ago.

Morning in the air again. It seemed to Clair, looking downward and around, that this was the land of morning. How many of them had she seen come over the strange pale hills? Would she see this one?

They were through now, the bulk of the frightened, amazed, uncomprehending Cro-Magnards and their women. Or such of them as had survived the attacks. Or such of them as had not been dragged into those caves of night. . . . But Clair would not look in that direction, nor think of those dismembered bodies the beast-men had dragged there. Here they came again—

Like a pelting rush of shadows. But shadows of sickening substance, with the gleam of low-set eyes in the foreheadless heads. They charged again, with their undulating moan rising to a scream, and the musk odor of their bodies was sickening. Sinclair's yell met the scream, and at sound of it the Cro-Magnards still unpast the valley point bunched forward uncertainly to meet the attack. . . . Sinclair himself Clair saw, dimly, stripped of bearskin cloak and every other encumberment, in his hand a great club of the beast-men.

Then the scurry of furred gray bodies was upon the Cro-Magnard line.

The morning seemed to have heard the impact. It was coming more quickly out of the wild, unknown, eastern lands. Clair felt its pale fore-radiance in her face as she darted here and there, heeding to the onward guiding of the main hunter-stream. Between two rocks they filed, into the unguessable valley-country beyond. Clair thought, wearily, "Will they never get through?" and heard herself chanting again foolishly, "Oh—do please hurry!"

Sinclair, on the westward slope, heard that cry. Then other interests engaged him. A great brute tore the club from his hands and took him by the throat. Its breath was fetid in his face. He kicked it, viciously, with a moccasined foot. It screamed and slipped away from him. He found a hunter stabbing methodically on either side. Not courage but comprehension they lacked. . . . Breathing space.

The Neanderthalers were swaying backward and downward again, moaning as they retreated. But, as throughout the hours since the migration had stumbled upon the fact that all one valley-wall was inhabited, other gray beasts were coming at a scrambling, swaying run to replace the rout. Tireless, scores on scores of them, reenforcements from the northward spur. Rational animals. Men almost. . . .

Lighter and lighter the darkness. It was gloaming. Sinclair heard Clair, far up the slope:

"Keith! Keith! All the women are through!"

He stumbled up through the ring of hunters toward the ring of her voice. Dawn near. White in the ghostly radiance. "Unhurt?"

He breathed sobbingly. "All right. Every one through?"

"Except those dozen with you."

"I'll send them up. Hurry on yourself."

"You're coming?"

"I'll come. In a minute." He grinned at her, gray-faced. "Do please hurry!"

He watched her disappear. He found himself sobbing again. Now the false dawn illumined the valley.

It rose in a cone, midway, and at the cone-tip the cliffs closed in on either side, allowing barely more than the passage of two men abreast. The red sandstone rocks were already a dun-rose color, though no sign of the actual sun came yet. It was snowing fleecily, but even as he turned back toward the westward slopes that ceased. The rear-guard bunched up toward him, and now in the morning light added to the light of the cave-fires, he saw the valley alive, like a spider's nest, with fresh hordes of the gray-furred beast-men.

They would follow on in hundreds. . . .

"Go through! Go through!"

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Panting, leaning against a rock, he saw them file past, the last of the hunters. Below, the gray hirsute whirlpool beginning to boil again. . . . Two or at the least one must stay with him; he could not do it alone. But whom? Not that old man. Nor this boy. Quick, quick. Whom? Whom? Aerte to guard Clair in the world beyond—ah, God, she had still her hunter! He heard himself shout with sudden strength:

"Turn south beyond this valley—south if you can! Keep watch always."

"But you will be there with us, brother." The last hunter, scarred and torn, swayed round and waited. Keith Sinclair cursed him.

"Go on! Go on!"

He heard the pad of retreating feet.

He found himself alone.

He started up, gripping his spear. He peered in the faces of the two who stood beside him.

Clair said, sitting down with a sigh: "Silly to think you could hold this place alone, Keith. So Aerte and I have come back."

The light grew brighter on the hunter's face. Sinclair stared at the two of them. Clair leaned her chin in her hands.

"Nightmare, Keith—but a wonderful one. Last dawn in Atlantis! . . . And the beasts that follow men—"

Thereat the sunrise, in a great hush that seemed to hold quiescent even the gathering attack of the Neanderthalers twenty yards below, sped suddenly up from the eastern end of the canyon and poured liquid through the narrow defile.

Clair's head now nodded on her shoulders. But she started up at Sinclair's last cry of entreaty.

"Clair!"

She stumbled between the two men. Her eyes turned to the horror below. "I'll stand behind with my spear. They're coming."

Twice they had come, and twice broken and shambled downward in screaming flight. Clair's spear was gone, the head embedded in a beast-man's chest. Sinclair leaned against the canyon wall, his right arm hanging by a pinch of skin, blood pouring from a dreadful stomach wound. . . . His face a battered mask, all human likeness had gone from the hunter. But she saw his eyes turned toward her, glazing eyes lovely and human still. He staggered to his feet. She felt suddenly serene and assured.

"Oh, my dears, it isn't long now! They are coming again—"

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I SHALL ARISE AGAIN

SHE awoke in a dazzle of sunshine that blinded her for a moment. She sat up and knuckled her eyes. She felt very tired—sun-tired, as though she had slept a long time in this warmth of the earth and sky. There was a continual drumming splash near at hand, like the sound of the sea heard far off. She took her hands from her eyes and looked round.

She was lying on a patch of sand on a low beach that sloped up to rocky verdant mountains. The violent green of the near underbrush waved, languid and warm, in the ghost of a breeze. Overhead was a sky deep and blue and touched with a sailing speck-net of clouds. A score of yards away the sea rumbled unhurrying on the beach.

The beast-men of the pass!

"Keith! Aerte!"

A gull whooped past her. Far up the mountainside a sudden roar grew to a grinding clamor, became a glittering snake in the sunlight, hissed; swept from view again. A railway train. . . .

She stared upward in paralyzed affright. Delirium. Of course it was delirium. For suddenly she had remembered. She was dead.

Morning—pass—the Neanderthalers—their last charge—a great mala chite club descending—Aerte and Keith gold and white and red-streaked veinings of foam under a wave of snarling grayness. She must still be alive and in delirium—the last alive of the *Magellan*.

She closed her eyes again, that the horror might pass, and willed to die also; and the wind touched her cheek and her hair came ruffling across her face, tickling her skin so that her hand went up involuntarily to put it aside. She opened her eyes on the green warm day. And then she saw something lying a few yards off, and, sobbing, was in a moment kneeling by the side of that something.

It was Keith Sinclair.

He lay unmoving, face downward in an outpost of the mountain grass. Kneeling in a blur of tears beside him, the thought: "I am mad; it is still delirium." For his body was unmarked by signs of struggle in the pass—that body from

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which the blood had welled in great gouts. She shook his shoulder.

"Keith. Oh, Keith, make it real!"

For answer he yawned where he lay, stretched his arms, stretched his legs, seemed to stretch every muscle in his body. Then, slowly and casually, he turned round and sat erect. His eyes seemed to have a gray film over them. He blinked, knuckling his eyes as she had knuckled hers. She sat back and watched him.

As she did so there came again, far up the slope, that muffled roar, the green of the mountain vegetation stirred ever so slightly, and again that metal toy monster swept round a curve and vanished with a loud whistle. Sinclair's head jerked upward. He stared with fallen jaw. Then he looked round him, smiled dazedly at Clair, and he too covered his eyes.

"By God," he said, *"we're back!"*

Then, "We'll go exploring in a minute. Azores or Madeira I should think. . . . Oh, I'm real enough and sound enough. So—and so. Convinced?"

She said, her voice muffled in his long hair: "Still a dream for all I know, for you did that often enough in my day-dreams. Oh, my dear! You're real and whole. . . . And ten minutes ago your arm was hanging by a thread from your shoulder—and that stomach-wound—"

Sinclair held her close. "But it wasn't ten minutes ago. It happened thousands of years ago, else we'd never see that train."

His arms about her still, he stared suddenly; laughed.

"What is it?"

"We were killed, of course—and by some chance didn't die. . . . We're back in the year 1932—unless some other accident has happened. It may be 2000."

She withdrew her head and looked at the brightening day. "Real. You and the world and myself. . . . And I know it's the year we left."

"So do I," he confessed. And thought aloud, "The railway trains of 2000 won't burn coal—"

"Keith, where are we?"

"Eh?" He looked round the scene again. Then: "We're in Morning Pass still. Look."

He pointed to the mountain-edge near at hand. Dimly, a ghostly scene in the sunlight, a remembrance shaped in Clair's mind. That boulder, that curve of rock that swept into the sea where the gray men mustered for their last attack. . . . But the left-ward wall of the pass had vanished into a smother of grass that was presently sand; beyond that also the murmur of the sea. . . . Ten minutes ago, twenty-five thousand years ago. . . . She saw him looking at her in quick understanding.

"We're back, Clair. Don't worry about it. Let's get up and do that exploring."

They stood up together, helping each other. And then it was Sinclair who was seized with an obsessing memory. He looked to right and left and broke away from her, searching. She stared after him.

"Keith!"

He halted in his search, looking over his shoulder. "Aerte—he must be here! He died with us."

But he turned fully round again, and they looked at each other white-faced. And then it seemed to Clair that his face had altered, that she knew at last the meaning of scores of puzzling resemblances that had torn her heart now this way, now that. She knew that she might cry again if she did not speak very quickly. She said:

"Don't you understand? I do at last. *You are Aerte.*"

THE deserted beach curved northward round the shoulder of the mountain. Out to sea a trail of smoke grew to being across the horizon, became a triune procession of dots that were funnels, and presently sank again, leaving that scroll-writing in the sky. But neither Clair nor Sinclair moved.

"I am Aerte." He sat with his hands clasped round his knees. "Just as he was the boy who died at Mametz and a score of others. Race-type, race-memory, blood of his blood—who can know? . . . And there was a you also in the painted caves. I didn't know then. Now—I saw her a dozen times, in a look, a way of walking. Lizair who died in the last forest—she was you."

Clair Stranlay stood with the sun in her face, dreaming also. "Oh, Keith, not only these two! Zumarr and her hunter—Aitz-kore—Lizair's boy-lover who died among the wolves—the young men who came back at evening singing—"

"They're here in the world still, all of them, that company that went over Sunrise Pass into the morning we never saw."

"But what happened then—that morn-

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ing? They must have got clear away."

"Somehow. Perhaps the Neanderthalers never pursued them after our end. Somehow they went east and south and found a place safe from the winter. And then they went east again, into the beginnings of history."

She stood with troubled lighted face, far in dreams, and he looked up at her suddenly with the gaze of the twentieth century; the custom of weeks fell from his eyes. Unconscious of herself and the beauty of herself in the fall of sunshine, her red hair blown on the tanned gold of her neck. Back!

She looked down and sighed and sat beside him. She smiled into those eyes that were not of the caves of Atlantis.

"Oh, we've awakened. . . ." She looked round the bright weather of the green beach. "We've come back. We'll be hungry in a little, and have to go round the hill, and hear people speak, and wear clothes again, and lie in the little rooms and never hear the midnight cry upon the mountains. That's finished and put by. . . . If only it was a pack of hyaenodon that waited us round that mountain bend!"

It was he who stood up now, with a laugh, and she also saw him with eyes that had lost the acceptance of many a day and scene. Keith Sinclair of the *Magellan*—never that Keith Sinclair again. . . . He smiled down at her. He held out his hand.

"Come along. We'll go and meet the hyaenodon."

She put her fingers in his. "I suppose we must. . . . Love me, my dear?"

"Till the hunters come back to the world again—and after."

She did not stir.

"Then there's still a moment we've never known, Keith, though we dreamed it in the Golden Age. It's still the same sun and earth—for a moment, before we go back to the world that's forgotten both."

Not looking at him, she yet saw his face change strangely, felt the pressure on her fingers alter, knew him kneeling beside her. She put her arms round his neck. He held her away a moment.

"Sure, Clair?"

"Till the hunters walk again."

She drew down his head very slowly, and kissed him tremulously, and the moment came out of the growing day, and waited for them with a quiver of purple wings, and was theirs for ever.

SENORA LEIRIA regarded her guest with admiration and uplifted her voice in throaty French.

"But they fit with exactitude!"

The guest raised a flushed smiling face. "Very sweet," she agreed, and thought: 'Oh, my good God, and I'll have to wear the things.' "

The thought was appalling. In the caves—

But the caves were twenty-five thousand years away.

Clair sat down. "I'll manage ever so nicely now I've had a bath and you've shown me the stuff I can choose from. I'll dress and come down in a minute or so."

The stout senora lingered, constitutional languor and aroused curiosity in combat. "The dreadful hours you must have spent, Senora Keith, after the wreck of your husband's boat!"

"Shocking." ("If she doesn't go away I'll—")

The door closed. Clair dropped the garments entrusted to her, stumbled to the casement window, and flung it wide open. Gasped with relief.

"The ghastly, ghastly smell of the place! Just the ordinary room smell? Wonder how Keith's getting on—or what he's getting on? . . . Those must be the roofs of San Miguel over there."

San Miguel of the Azores. . . .

She began to laugh. That servant whom Keith had encountered—

Three hours ago. They'd rounded the mountain bend into view of open cultivated country, a road half a mile away alive with automobiles, and, in the foreground, on a branch of the road and not more than eighty yards from where they stood, a low and gabled house with a garden and the white shirt-sleeves of a gardener.

Clair had sunk hastily to the ground. "Don't shock them too much, Keith. They've never seen tatters like ours."

He had grinned and set out, long-striding. Almost immediately there was catastrophe. Avoiding the main door and turning rightward through the garden he had collided with a diminutive female in some kind of domestic uniform. Her shrieks preceding him, he had disappeared from Clair's view for a quarter of an hour, and, just as she had begun to wonder about his safety, had emerged from that main door and approached her.

"It's all right, Clair. Put on this coat

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of the Senora's. We're in the Azores. Portuguese. I've told them a few lies to avoid unbelievable explanations."

"Keith—that ulster of yours!" She had struggled into the coat, half-hysterical. Surveyed herself: "And I look like something saved by some ghastly missionary. . . . What were the lies?"

"Coming? Senora Leiria is going to look after you and get you some clothes .... We're the Keiths, an English couple, husband and wife. We've a craze for boating. Tried to reach San Miguel from Santarem in our three-ton yacht—"

"Are there three-ton yachts?"

"Eh? No idea. But early this morning we met a squall and were upset. We swam. This is all that's left of our clothes. You're Mrs. Keith, remember."

"But we'll have to tell some of the truth later."

"We won't be able to avoid that. But this is the best meanwhile. I've realized just in time that our banks'll refuse us draft, as they'll believe us lost in the *Magellan*. But I keep an alias account—name of Keith, League of Militant Pacifist purposes—and can always order on it by a code message. . . ." They were under the garden wall. "Now—"

Now, with a curious shambling motion, upraised upon the heels of unaccustomed shoes, Clair Stranlay crossed the floor of Senora Leiria's bedroom and began to descend the stairs. At the foot of the first landing was an open door, and beyond—

"Clair! Hell, what a mess!"

He was tugging to ease an unaccustomed collar. He had risen from uneasy sprawling in a becushioned chair. He pushed her away from him.

"Servants! Diseased animals sweating to tend diseased animals! Why do they? Why the devil do they? Pack a room like this? All this nonsense of furniture. Pottering in that damned garden. . . . Flowers: they grow much better wild; any fool knows it. You can see them opposite the caves—purple-growing blooms. Some time the firelight reaches across the river to them—"

"Keith!"

She closed the door behind her. He sat down and buried his face in his hands. He looked up at her with just such film over his eyes as she had seen on them at his awakening.

"Sorry. Went crack for a moment. . . . All this—God, we can never endure it again, Clair! Beyond this house there are the towns and the filth and the stench. London on a wet Sunday afternoon. The shoddy crowds of the Boul' Mich'. Newsboys screaming, trains screaming. . . . It would kill us after—after that."

"What are we going to do, then?"

"Clear out to the South Seas or some such place."

"Escape?"

"Escape."

"My dear, I'd sooner go down to the sea there and walk out into it." She started to cross the room toward him.

She knelt beside him. "I'm going to do what *you* are going to do. Go back to the world we came from. Tell them we survived the *Magellan*—and then preach Atlantis to our dying day!"

"Tell them what happened? Who'd ever believe it? Can't you hear the bray of the head-lines?—remember how they vilified Mitchell Hedges?"

She smiled the old gay smile with no irony at all in it. "Different from that. Up-stairs I suddenly knew what we would do. We can't desert the world—we've no right to— Not while there are still Neanderthalers alive—in general's uniforms. Not while they still can lie about the everlastingness of rich and poor and innate human ferocity. Not while our hunters are still in the world—somewhere out there, Keith!—chained and gagged and brutalized, begging in streets, cheating in offices, doing dirty little cruelties in prison wards. . . . Remember that world you planned beyond the southern mountains? It's still a possible world and it's still a possible civilization."

"This disease of mine is merely agoraphobia, of course. It'll pass."

"Then—?"

"Of course." He caught her hand and stood up with her. He winced at his straining clothes, as she did. Clair's laughter had survived Atlantis. He shook her, very gently. "We could never do anything else, I suppose—even though we bring a fling spear against a sixteen-inch gun."

THEY stood together in the sunset. The sea rumbled again at their feet in the beat of the incoming tide. And out for miles, hasting into the west, the fading light leaped from roller to roller of the Atlantic. Remote above them the culvert belched out another train to sweep the mountain track down to San Miguel.

Sinclair's hand fell on Clair's.

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"Time we went back. The Leirias dine early, they said."

"I know. But just a minute more. . . . Tomorrow's so near."

"Eh?"

"To-morrow and all the things of which we've talked. You'll get money and we'll go into San Miguel and sail to France, and begin the fight for sanity; and the world will vex and thwart us and we'll grow bitter, and grow old till those four weeks—"

He put his arms around her.

"We're going to work and fight together. We're going to marry. Children we'll have like yourself—keen and lovely as you. We'll do all the things you said this forenoon when the future scared me. We'll light a torch and we'll never let it die."

She did not move, still staring out to sea.

"Oh, Keith, I know. This is only a moment with me also, and it'll pass and be forgotten. Do you think I won't love the fight as well?—or love loving you and bearing your babies and taming your temper and—and seeing you always have a nice fresh razor blade? It isn't that. Only—"

It was almost dark. He held her gently, unimpatiently.

"Only—?"

"Oh, Keith, say you'll never forget them!—all those days? Remember that first night? Remember the golden hunters on the western hill? Remember the fires?

"Remember the laughter and the kindliness of them? Remember the road to Sunrise Pass? . . . We'll forget and forget, and the years'll come tramping over our lives and memories—"

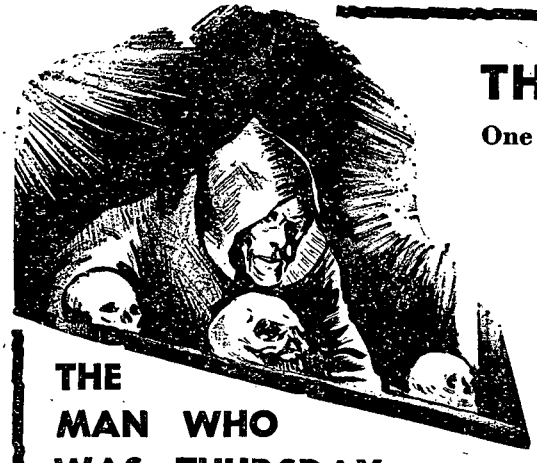
"But not these memories." His arms tightened round her. "They'll live as long as we do. They're things undying. They live though human nature go into an underground pit for all of a million years."

She stirred in his arms. She touched his cheek in shadowy caress.

"The Leirias are just now lighting their lamps."

But as they passed together out of the noise of the sea to the lighted night and the waiting world, Clair caught his hand and turned back a moment to the rolling waste of waters whereneath lies buried these twenty thousand years the mythic land of Atlantis:

"Good-by, my dears!"



THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY

by G. K. Chesterton

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As he lifted his foot the mould went plop, plop, plop!

THE DERELICT

By William Hope Hodgson

Doomed men they were, caught in a dread phenomenon of Nature run amok. . . . What was the hideous secret of the Bheotpte—the derelict ship that no man could board and live?

"IT'S the *Material,*" said the old ship's doctor. . . . "The *Material,* plus the conditions; and, maybe," he added slowly, "a third factor—yes, a third factor; but there, there. . . ." He broke off his half-meditative sentence, and began to charge his pipe.

"Go on, Doctor," we said encouragingly, and with more than a little expectancy. We were in the smoke-room of the *Sand-a-lea,* running across the North Atlantic; and the doctor was a character. He concluded the charging of his pipe, and lit it; then settled himself, and began to express himself more fully.

"The *Material,*" he said, with conviction, "is inevitably the medium of expression of the Life-Force—the fulcrum, as it were; lacking which, it is unable to exert itself, or, indeed, to express it-

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self in any form or fashion that would be intelligible or evident to us.

"So potent is the share of the *Material* in the production of that thing which we name Life, and so eager the Life-Force to express itself, that I am convinced it would, if given the right conditions, make itself manifest even through so hopeless-seeming a medium as a simple block of sawn wood; for I tell you, gentlemen, the Life-Force is both as fiercely urgent and as indiscriminate as Fire—the Destructor; yet which some are now growing to consider the very essence of Life rampant. . . . There is a quaint seeming paradox there," he concluded, nodding his old gray head.

"Yes, Doctor," I said. "In brief, your argument is that Life is a thing, state, fact, or element, call-it-what-you-like, which requires the *Material* through which to manifest itself, and that given the *Material,* plus the conditions, the result is Life. In other words, that Life is an evolved product, manifested through Matter and bred of conditions—eh?"

"As we understand the word," said the old doctor. "Though, mind you, there *may* be a third factor. But, in my heart, I believe that it is a matter of chemistry; conditions and a suitable medium; but given the conditions, the Brute is so almighty that it will seize upon anything through which to manifest itself. It is a force generated by conditions; but nevertheless this does not bring us one iota nearer to its *explanation,* any more than to the explanation of electricity or fire. They are, all three, of the Outer Forces—Monsters of the Void. Nothing we can do will *create* any one of them; our power is merely to be able, by providing the conditions, to make each one of them manifest to our physical senses. Am I clear?"

"Yes, Doctor, in a way you are," I said. "But I don't agree with you; though I think I understand you. Electricity and fire are both what I might call natural things; but life is an abstract something—a kind of all-permeating wakefulness. Oh, I can't explain it; who could? But it's spiritual; not just a thing bred out of a condition, like fire, as you say, or electricity. It's a horrible thought of yours. Life's a kind of spiritual mystery. . . ."

"Easy, my boy!" said the old doctor, laughing gently to himself; "or else I may be asking you to demonstrate the spiritual mystery of life of the limpet, or the crab, shall we say?"

HE GRINNED at me, with ineffable perverseness. "Anyway," he continued, "as I suppose you've guessed, I've a yarn to tell you in support of my impression that life is no more a mystery or a miracle than fire or electricity. But, please to remember, gentlemen, that because you've succeeded in naming and making good use of these two forces, they're just as much mysteries, fundamentally, as ever.

"And, anyway, the thing I'm going to tell you, won't explain the mystery of life; but only give you one of my pegs on which I hang my feeling that life is, as I have said, a force made manifest through conditions (that is to say, natural chemistry), and that it can take for its purpose and need, the most incredible and unlikely matter; for without matter, it cannot come into existence—it cannot become manifest. . . ."

"I don't agree with you, Doctor," I interrupted. "Your theory would destroy all belief in life after death. It would. . . ."

"Hush, sonny," said the old man, with a quiet little smile of comprehension. "Hark to what I have to say first; and, anyway, what objection have you to material life, after death? And if you object to a material framework, I would still have you remember that I am speaking of life, as we understand the word in this our life. Now do be a quiet lad, or I'll never be done.

"It was when I was a young man, and that is a good many years ago, gentlemen. I had passed my examination; but was so run down with overwork, that it was decided that I had better take a trip to sea. I was by no means well off, and very glad, in the end, to secure a nominal post as a doctor in a sailing passenger-clipper, running out to China.

"The name of the ship was the *Bheotpte,* and soon after I had got all my gear aboard, she cast off, and we dropped down the Thames, and next day were well away out in the Channel.

"The captain's name was Gannington, a very decent man; though quite illiterate. The first mate, Mr. Berlies, was a quiet, sternish, reserved man, very well read. The second mate, Mr. Selvern, was, perhaps, by birth and upbringing, the most socially cultured of the three; but

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he lacked the stamina and indomitable pluck of the other two. He was more of a sensitive; and emotionally and even mentally, the most alert man of the three.

"On our way out, we called at Madagascar, where we landed some of our passengers; then we ran eastward, meaning to call at North-West Cape; but about a hundred degrees east, we encountered a very dreadful weather, which carried away all our sails and sprung the jibboom and fore t'gallant mast.

"THE storm carried us northward for several hundred miles, and when it dropped us finally, we found ourselves in a very bad state. The ship had been strained, and had taken some three feet of water through her seams; the main topmast had been sprung, in addition to the jibboom and fore t'gallant mast; two of our boats had gone, as also one of the pigsties (with three fine pigs), this latter having been washed overboard but some half hour before the wind began to ease, which it did quickly; though a very ugly sea ran for some hours after.

"The wind left us just before dark, and when morning came, it brought splendid weather; a calm, mildly undulating sea, and a brilliant sun, with no wind. It showed us also that we were not alone; for about two miles away to the westward was another vessel, which Mr. Selvern, the second mate, pointed out to me.

"'That's a pretty rum-looking packet, Doctor,' he said, and handed me his glass. I looked through it, at the other vessel, and saw what he meant; at least, I thought I did.

"'Yes, Mr. Selvern,' I said, 'she's got a pretty old-fashioned look about her.'

He laughed at me, in his pleasant way.

"'It's easy to see you're not a sailor, Doctor,' he remarked. 'There's a dozen rum things about her. She's a derelict, and has been floating round, by the look of her, for many a score of years. Look at the shape of her counter, and the bows and cut-water. She's as old as the hills, as you might say, and ought to have gone down to Davy Jones a long time ago.

"Look at the growths on her, and the thickness of her standing rigging; that's all salt encrustations, I fancy, if you notice the white color. She's been a small barque; but don't you see she's not a yard left aloft? They've all dropped out of the slings; everything rotted away; wonder the standing rigging hasn't gone too. I wish the Old Man would let us take the boat, and have a look at her; she's well worth it.'

"There seemed very little chance of this, however; for all hands were turned-to and kept hard at it all day long, repairing the damage to the masts and gear, and this took a long while, as you may think. Part of the time I gave a hand, heaving on one of the deck-capstans; for the exercise was good for my liver. Old Captain Gannington approved, and I persuaded him to come along and try some of the medicine, which he did; and we grew very chummy over the job.

"We got talking about the derelict, and he remarked how lucky we were not to have run full tilt on to her, in the darkness; for she lay right away to leeward of us, according to the way that we had been drifting in the storm. He also was of the opinion that she had a strange look about her, and that she was pretty old but on this latter point he plainly had far less knowledge than the second mate; for he was, as I have said, an illiterate man, and he knew nothing of seacraft beyond what experience had taught him. He lacked the book knowledge, which the second mate had, of vessels previous to his day, which it appeared the derelict was.

"'She's an old 'un, Doctor,' was the extent of his observations in this direction.

"Yet, when I mentioned to him that it would be interesting to go aboard, and give her a bit of an overhaul, he nodded his head, as if the idea had already been in his mind.

"'When the work's over, Doctor,' he said. 'Can't spare the men now, ye know. Got to get all shipshape an' ready as smart as we can. But we'll take my gig, an' go off in the Second Dog Watch. The glass is steady, an' it'll be a bit of jam for us.'

"THAT evening, after tea, the captain gave orders to clear the gig and get overboard. The second mate was to come with us, and the skipper gave him word to see that two or three lamps were put into the boat, as it would soon fall dark. A little later, we were pulling across the calmness of the sea with a crew of six at the oars, and making very

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"Now, gentlemen, I have detailed to you, with great exactness, all the facts, both big and little, so that you can follow step by step each incident in this extraordinary affair; and I want you now to pay the closest attention.

"I was sitting in the stern-sheets, with the second mate and the captain, who was steering; and as we drew nearer and nearer to the stranger, I studied her with an ever-growing attention, as, indeed, did the captain and the second mate. She was, as you know, the westward of us, and the sunset was making a great flame of red light to the back of her, so that she showed a little blurred and indistinct by reason of the halation of the light, which almost defeated the eye in any attempt to see her rotting spars and standing rigging, submerged as they were in the fiery glory of the sunset.

"It was because of the effect of the sunset that we had come quite close, comparatively, to the derelict before we saw that she was surrounded by a sort of curious scum, the color of which was difficult to decide upon, by reason of the red light that was in the atmosphere; but which afterwards we discovered to be brown. This scum spread all about the old vessel for many hundreds of yards, in a huge, irregular patch, a great stretch of which reached out to the eastward, upon our starboard side, some score, or so, fathoms away.

"'Queer stuff,' said Captain Gannington, leaning to the side, and looking over. 'Something in the cargo as 'as gone rotten an' worked out through 'er seams.'

"'Look at her bows and stern,' said the second mate; 'just look at the growth of her.'

"There were, as he said, great clumpings of strange-looking sea-fungi under the bows and the short counter astern. From the stump of her jibboom and her cutwater, great beards of rime and marine growths hung downward into the scum that held her in. Her blank starboard side was presented to us, all a dead, dirtyish white, streaked and mottled vaguely with dull masses of heavier color.

"'There's a steam of haze rising off her,' said the second mate, speaking again; 'you can see it against the light. It keeps coming and going. Look!'

"I saw then what he meant—a faint haze or steam, either suspended above the old vessel, or rising from her; and Captain Gannington saw it also.

"'Spontaneous combustion!' he exclaimed. 'We'll 'ave to watch w'en we lift the 'atches; 'nless it's some poor devil that's got aboard her; but that ain't likely.'

"We were now within a couple of hundred yards of the old derelict, and had entered into the brown scum. As it poured off the lifted oars, I heard one of the men mutter to himself: 'Damn treacle!' and indeed, it was something like it.

"As the boat continued to forge nearer and nearer to the old ship, the scum grew thicker and thicker; so that, at last, it perceptibly slowed us.

"'Give way, lads! Put some beef to it!' sung out the captain; and thereafter there was no sound, except the panting of the men, and the faint, reiterated *suck, suck,* of the sullen brown scum upon the oars, as the boat was forced ahead. As we went, I was conscious of a peculiar smell in the evening air, and whilst I had no doubt that the puddling of the scum, by the oars, made it rise, I felt that in some way, it was vaguely familiar; yet I could give it no name.

"We were now very close to the old vessel, and presently she was high above us, against the dying light. The captain called out then to 'in with the bow oars, and stand-by with the boat-hook,' which was done.

"'Aboard there! Ahoy! Aboard there! Ahoy!' shouted Captain Gannington, but there came no answer, only the flat sound of his voice going lost into the open sea, each time he sang out.

"'Ahoy! Aboard there! Ahoy!' he shouted, time after time; but there was only the weary silence of the old hulk that answered us; and, somehow as he shouted, the while that I stared up half expectantly at her, a queer little sense of oppression, that amounted almost to nervousness came upon me. It passed, but I remember how I was suddenly aware that it was growing dark. Darkness comes fairly rapidly in the tropics, though not so quickly as many fiction-writers seem to think; but it was not that the coming dusk had perceptibly deepened in that brief time, of only a few moments, but rather that my nerves had made me suddenly a little hypersensitive. I mention my state particularly; for I am not a nervy man, normally; and my abrupt touch of nerves is significant, in the light of what happened.

"'There's no one aboard there!' said

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Captain Gannington. 'Give way, men!' For the boat's crew had instinctively rested on their oars, as the captain hailed the old craft. The men gave way again; and then the second mate called out excitedly: 'Why, look there, there's our pigsty! See, it's got *Bheotpte* painted on the end. It's drifted down here, and the scum's caught it. What a blessed wonder!'

"It was as he had said, our pigsty that had been washed overboard in the storm, and it was most extraordinary to come across it there.

" 'We'll tow it off with us, when we go,' remarked the captain, and shouted to the crew to get down to their oars; for they were hardly moving the boat, because the scum was so thick, close in around the old ship, that it literally clogged the boat from going ahead. I remember that it struck me in a half-conscious sort of way, as curious that the pigsty, containing our three dead pigs, had managed to drift so far, unaided, whilst we could scarcely manage to *force* the boat in now that we had come right into the scum. But the thought passed from my mind; for so many things happened within the next few minutes.

"THE men managed to bring the boat alongside, within a couple of feet of the derelict, and the man with the boathook hooked on.

" 'Ave you got 'old there, forrard?' asked the captain. 'Yessir!' said the bow man; and as he spoke there came a queer noise of tearing.

" 'What's that?' asked the captain.

" 'It's tore, sir. Tore clean away!' said the man; and his tone showed that he had received something of a shock.

" 'Get a hold again, then!' said Captain Gannington, irritably. 'You don't s'pose this packet was built yesterday! Shove the hook into the main chains.' The man did so gingerly, as you might say; for it seemed to me, in the growing dusk, that he put no strain on the hook, though, of course, there was no need; you see, the boat could not go very far, of herself, in the stuff in which she was embedded. I remember thinking this, also, as I looked up at the bulging side of the old vessel. Then I heard Captain Gannington's voice:

" 'Lord, but she's old! An' what a color, Doctor! She don't half want paint, do she! . . . Now then, somebody—one of them oars.'

"An oar was passed to him, and he leaned it up against the ancient, bulging side, then he paused, and called to the second mate to light a couple of lamps, and stand by to pass them up; for the darkness had settled down now upon the sea.

"The second mate lit two of the lamps, and told one of the men to light a third, and keep it handy in the boat; then he stepped across, with a lamp in each hand, to where Captain Gannington stood by the oar against the side of the ship.

" 'Now, my lad,' said the captain, to the man who had pulled stroke, 'up with you, an' we'll pass ye the lamps.'

"The man jumped to obey; caught the oar, and put his weight upon it, and as he did so, something seemed to give a little.

" 'Look!' cried the second mate, and pointed, lamp in hand. . . . 'It's sunk in!'

"This was true. The oar had made quite an indentation into the bulging, somewhat slimy side of the old vessel.

" 'Mould, I reckon,' said Captain Gannington, bending towards the derelict, to look. Then to the man:

" 'Up you go, my lad, and be smart. . . . Don't stand there waitin'!'

"At that, the man, who had paused a moment as he felt the oar give beneath his weight, began to shin up, and in a few seconds he was aboard, and leaned over the rail for the lamps. These were passed up to him, and the captain called to him to steady the oar. Then Captain Gannington went, calling me to follow, and after me the second mate.

"As the captain put his face over the rail, he gave a cry of astonishment:

" 'Mould, by gum! Mould. . . . Tons of it! . . . Good Lord!'

"As I heard him shout that, I scrambled the more eagerly after him, and in a moment or two, I was able to see what he meant—everywhere that the light from the two lamps struck, there was nothing but smooth, great masses and surfaces of a dirty-white mould.

"I climbed over the rail, with the second mate close behind, and stood upon the mould-covered decks. There might have been no planking beneath the mould, for all that our feet could feel. It gave under our tread, with a spongy, puddingy feel. It covered the deck-furniture of the old ship, so that the shape of each article and fitment was often no more than suggested through it.

"Captain Gannington snatched a lamp

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from the other man, and the second mate reached for the other. They held the lamps high, and we all stared. It was most extraordinary, and, somehow, most abominable. I can think of no other word, gentlemen, that so much describes the predominant feeling that effected me at the moment.

"'Good Lord!' said Captain Gannington, several times. 'Good Lord!' But neither the second mate nor the man said anything, and for my part I just stared, and at the same time began to smell a little at the air, for there was again a vague odor of something half familiar, that somehow brought to me a sense of half-known fright.

"I TURNED this way and that, staring, as I have said. Here and there, the mould was so heavy as to entirely disguise what lay beneath, converting the deck-fittings into indistinguishable mounds of mould, all dirty-white, and blotched and veined with irregular, dull purplish markings.

"There was a strange thing about the mould, which Captain Gannington drew attention to—it was that our feet did not crush into it and break the surface, as might have been expected, but merely indented it.

"'Never seen nothin' like it before! . . . Never!' said the captain, after having stooped with his lamp to examine the mould under our feet. He stamped with his heel, and the stuff gave out a dull, puddingy sound. He stooped again, with a quick movement, and stared, holding the lamp close to the deck. 'Blest if it ain't a reg'lar skin to it!' he said.

"The second mate and the man and I all stooped, and looked at it. The second mate prodded it with his forefinger, and I remember I rapped it several times with my knuckles, listening to the dead sound it gave out, and noticing the close, firm texture of the mould.

"'Dough!' said the second mate. 'It's just like blessed dough! . . . Pouf!' He stood up with a quick movement. 'I could fancy it stinks a bit,' he said.

"As he said this, I knew suddenly what the familiar thing was in the vague odor that hung about us—it was that the smell had something animal-like in it; something of the same smell only *heavier*, that you smell in any place that is infested with mice. I began to look about with a sudden, very real uneasiness. . . . There might be vast numbers of hungry rats aboard. . . . They might prove exceedingly dangerous, if in a starving condition, yet, as you will understand, somehow I hesitated to put forward my idea as a reason for caution. It was too fanciful.

"Captain Gannington had begun to go aft, along the mould-covered main-deck, with the second mate; each of them holding his lamp high up, so as to cast a good light about the vessel. I turned quickly and followed them, the man with me keeping close to my heels, and plainly uneasy. As we went, I became aware that there was a feeling of moisture in the air, and I remembered the slight mist, or smoke, above the hulk, which had made Captain Gannington suggest spontaneous combustion in explanation.

"And always, as we went, there was that vague animal smell; and suddenly I found myself wishing we were well away from the old vessel.

"Abruptly, after a few paces, the captain stopped and pointed at a row of mould-hidden shapes on either side of the main-deck. . . . 'Guns,' he said. 'Been a privateer in the old days, I guess; maybe worse! We'll 'ave a look below, doctor; there may be something worth touchin'. She's older than I thought. Mr. Selvern thinks she's about three hundred years old; but I scarce think it.'

"We continued our way aft, and I remember that I found myself walking as lightly and gingerly as possible; as if I were subconsciously afraid of treading through the rotten, mould-hid decks. I think the others had a touch of the same feeling, from the way that they walked. Occasionally the soft mould would grip our heels, releasing them with a little, sullen suck.

"The captain forged somewhat ahead of the second mate, and I know that the suggestion he had made himself, that perhaps there might be something below, worth the carrying away, had stimulated his imagination. The second mate was, however, beginning to feel somewhat the same way that I did; at least, I have that impression. I think if it had not been for what I might truly describe as Captain Gannington's sturdy courage, we should all of us have just gone back over the side very soon; for there was most certainly an unwholesome feeling aboard that made one feel queerly lacking in pluck, and you will soon perceive that this feeling was justified.

"Just as the captain reached the few,

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mould-covered steps, leading up on to the short half-poop, I was suddenly aware that the feeling of moisture in the air had grown very much more definite. It was perceptible now, intermittently, as a sort of thin, moist, foglike vapor, that came and went oddly, and seemed to make the decks a little indistinct to the view, this time and that. Once, an odd puff of it beat up suddenly from somewhere, and caught me in the face, carrying a queer, sickly, heavy odor with it, that somehow frightened me strangely, with a suggestion of a waiting and half-comprehended danger.

"WE HAD followed Captain Gannington up the three mould-covered steps, and now went slowly aft along the raised after-deck.

"By the mizen-mast, Captain Gannington paused, and held his lantern near it. . . .

" 'My word, mister,' he said to the second mate, 'it's fair thickened up with the mould; why, I'll g'antee it's close on four foot thick.' He shone the light down to where it met the deck. 'Good Lord!' he said. 'Look at the sea-lice on it!' I stepped up; and it was as he had said; the sea-lice were thick upon it, some of them huge, not less than the size of large beetles, and all a clear, colorless shade, like water except where there were little spots of gray in them—evidently their internal organisms.

" 'I've never seen the like of them, 'cept on a live cod!' said Captain Gannington, in an extremely puzzled voice. 'My word, but they're whoppers!' Then he passed on, but a few paces farther aft, he stopped again, and held his lamp near to the mould-hidden deck.

" 'Lord bless me, Doctor!' he called out, in a low voice. 'Did you ever see the like of that? Why, it's a foot long, if it's a hinch!'

"I stooped over his shoulder, and saw what he menat; it was a clear, colorless creature, about a foot long, and about eight inches high, with a curved back that was extraordinary narrow. As we stared, all in a group, it gave a queer little flick, and was gone.

" 'Jumped!' said the captain. 'Well, if that ain't a giant of all the sea-lice that I've ever seen! I guess it jumped twenty foot clear.' He straightened his back, and scratched his head a moment, swinging the lantern this way and that with the other hand, and staring about us. 'Wot are *they* doin' aboard 'ere!' he said. 'You'll see 'em (little things) on fat cod, an' such like. . . . I'm blowed, Doctor, if I understand.'

"He held his lamp towards a big mound of the mould, that occupied part of the after portion of the low poop-deck, a little foreside of where there came a two-foot high 'break' to a kind of second and loftier poop, that ran away aft to the taffrail. The mound was pretty big, several feet across, and more than a yard high. Captain Gannington walked up to it.

" 'I reckon this's the scuttle,' he remarked, and gave it a heavy kick. The only result was a deep indentation into the huge, whitish hump of mould, as if he had driven his foot into a mass of some doughy substance. Yet, I am not altogether correct in saying that this was the only result; for a certain other thing happened—from a place made by the captain's foot, there came a little gush of purplish fluid, accompanied by a peculiar smell, that was, and was not, half familiar. Some of the mouldlike substance had stuck to the toe of the captain's boot, and from this, likewise, there issued a sweat, as it were, of the same color.

" 'Well!' said Captain Gannington, in surprise, and drew back his foot to make another kick at the hump of mould; but he paused, at an exclamation from the second mate:

" 'Don't, sir!' said the second mate.

"I glanced at him, and the light from Captain Gannington's lamp showed me that his face had a bewildered, half-frightened look, as if it were suddenly and unexpectedly half afraid of something, and as if his tongue had given way to his sudden fright, without any intention on his part to speak.

"The captain also turned and stared at him.

" 'Why, mister?' he asked, in a somewhat puzzled voice, through which there sounded just the vaguest hint of annoyance. "We've got to shift this muck, if we're to get below.'

"I looked at the second mate, and it seemed to me that, curiously enough, he was listening less to the captain, than to some other sound.

"Suddenly, he said in a queer voice: 'Listen, everybody!'

"Yet we heard nothing, beyond the faint murmur of the men talking together in the boat alongside.

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"'I don't hear nothin',' said Captain Gannington, after a short pause. 'Do you, Doctor?'

"'No,' I said.

"'What was it you thought you heard?' asked the captain, turning again to the second mate. But the second mate shook his head, in a curious, almost irritable way; as if the captain's question interrupted his listening. Captain Gannington stared a moment at him, then held his lantern up, and glanced about him, almost uneasily. I know I felt a queer sense of strain. But the light showed nothing, beyond the grayish, dirty white of the mould in all directions.

"'Mister Selvern,' said the captain at last, looking at him, 'don't get fancying things. Get hold of your bloomin' self. Ye know ye heard nothin'?'

"I'm quite sure I heard something, sir!' said the second mate. 'I seemed to hear—' He broke off sharply, and appeared to listen, with an almost painful intensity.

"'What did it sound like?' I asked.

"'It's all right, Doctor,' said Captain Gannington, laughing gently. 'Ye can give him a tonic when we get back. I'm goin' to shift this stuff.'

"He drew back, and kicked for the second time at the ugly mass, which he took to hide the companion-way. The result of his kick was startling; for the whole thing wobbled sloppily, like a mound of unhealthy-looking jelly.

"He drew his foot out of it quickly, and took a step backwards, staring, and holding his lamp towards it.

"'By gum!' he said, and it was plain that he was genuinely startled. 'The blessed thing's gone soft!'

"THE man had run back several steps from the suddenly flaccid mound, and looked horribly frightened. Though, of what, I am sure he had not the least idea. The second mate stood where he was, and stared. For my part, I know I had a most hideous uneasiness upon me. The captain continued to hold his light towards the wobbling mound, and stare.

"'It's gone squashy all through!' he said. 'There's no scuttle there. There's no bally woodwork inside that lot! Phoo! What a rum smell!'

"He walked round to the after-side of the strange mound, to see whether there might be some signs of an opening into the hull at the back of the great heap of mould-stuff. And then:

"'*Listen!*' said the second mate, again, and in the strangest sort of voice.

"Captain Gannington straightened himself upright, and there succeeded a pause of the most intense quietness, in which there was not even the hum of talk from the men alongside in the boat. We all heard it—a kind of dull, soft, *Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud!* somewhere in the hull under us, yet so vague that I might have been half doubtful I heard it, only that the others did so, too.

"Captain Gannington turned suddenly to where the man stood:

"'Tell them—' he began. But the fellow cried out something, and pointed. There had come a strange intensity into his somewhat unemotional face; so that the captain's glance followed his action instantly. I stared, also, as you may think. It was the great mound, at which the man was pointing. I saw what he meant.

"From the two gaps made in the mould-like stuff by Captain Gannington's boot, the purple fluid was jetting out in a queerly regular fashion, almost as if it were being forced out by a pump. My word, but I stared! And even as I stared, a larger jet squirted out, and splashed as far as the man, spattering his boots and trouser-legs.

"The fellow had been pretty nervous before, in a stolid, ignorant way, and his funk had been growing steadily; but, at this, he simply let out a yell, and turned about to run. He paused an instant, as if a sudden fear of the darkness that held the decks between him and the boat had taken him. He snatched at the second mate's lantern, tore it out of his hand, and plunged heavily away over the vile stretch of mould.

"Mr. Selvern, the second mate, said not a word; he was just standing, staring at the strange-smelling twin streams of dull purple that were jetting out from the wobbling mound. Captain Gannington, however, roared an order to the man to come back; but the man plunged on and on across the mould, his feet seeming to be clogged by the stuff, as if it had grown suddenly soft. He zigzagged as he ran, the lantern swaying in wild circles as he wrenched his feet free, with a constant *plop, plop;* and I could hear his frightened gasps, even from where I stood.

"'Come back with that lamp!' roared the captain again; but still the man took no notice, and Captain Gannington was silent an instant, his lips working in a

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queer, inarticulate fashion; as if he were stunned momentarily by the very violence of his anger at the man's insubordination. And, in the silence, I heard the sound again: *Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud!* Quite distinctly now, beating, it seemed suddenly to me, right down under my feet, but deep.

"I stared down at the mould on which I was standing, with a quick, disgusting sense of the terrible all about me; then I looked at the captain, and tried to say something, without appearing frightened. I saw that he had turned again to the mound, and all the anger had gone out of his face. He had his lamp out toward the mound, and was listening. There was a further moment of absolute silence; at least, I know that I was not conscious of any sound at all, in all the world, except that extraordinary *Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud* down somewhere in the huge bulk under us.

"The captain shifted his feet, with a sudden, nervous movement; and as he lifted them, the mould went *plop, plop.* He looked quickly at me, trying to smile, as if he were not thinking anything very much about it. 'What do you make of it, Doctor?' he said.

"'I think—' I began. But the second mate interrupted with a single word; his voice pitched a little high, in a tone that made us both stare instantly at him.

"'Look!' he said, and pointed at the mound. The thing was all of a slow quiver. A strange ripple ran outward from it, along the deck, as you will see a ripple run inshore out of a calm sea. It reached a mound a little fore-side of us, which I supposed to be the cabin-skylight; and in a moment the second mound sank nearly level with the surrounding decks, quivering floppily in a most extraordinary fashion. A sudden quick tremor took the mould right under the second mate, and he gave out a hoarse cry, and held his arms out on each side of him, to keep his balance. The tremor in the mould spread, and Captain Gannington swayed, and spread his feet with a sudden curse of fright. The second mate jumped across to him, and caught him by the wrist.

"'The boat, sir!' he said, saying the very thing that I had lacked the pluck to say. 'For God's sake—'

"But he never finished; for a tremendous hoarse scream cut off his words. They hove themselves round, and looked. I could see without turning. The man who had run from us, was standing in the waist of the ship, about a fathom from the starboard bulwarks.

"He was swaying from side to side and screaming in a dreadful fashion. He appeared to be trying to lift his feet, and the light from his swaying lantern showed an almost incredible sight. All about him the mould was in active movement. His feet had sunk out of sight. The stuff appeared to be *lapping* at his legs; and abruptly his bare flesh showed.

"The hideous stuff had rent his trouser-legs away, as if they were paper. He gave out a simply sickening scream, and, with a vast effort, wrenched one leg free. It was partly destroyed. The next instant he pitched face downward, and the stuff heaped itself upon him, as if it were actually alive, with a dreadful savage life. It was simply infernal. The man had gone from sight. Where he had fallen was now a writhing mound, in constant and horrible increase, as the mould appeared to move toward it in strange ripples from all sides.

"CAPTAIN GANNINGTON and the second mate were stone silent, in amazed and incredulous horror; but I had begun to reach towards a grotesque and terrific conclusion, both helped and hindered by my professional training.

"From the men in the boat alongside, there was a loud shouting, and I saw two of their faces appear suddenly above the rail. They showed clearly, a moment, in the light from the lamp which the man had snatched from Mr. Selvern; for strangely enough, this lamp was standing upright and unharmed on the deck, a little way fore-side of that dreadful, elongated, growing mound, that still swayed and writhed with an incredible horror.

The lamp rose and fell on the passing ripples of the mould just—for all the world—as you will see a boat rise and fall on little swells. It is of some interest to me now, psychologically, to remember how that rising and falling lantern brought home to me, more than anything, the incomprehensible, dreadful strangeness of it all.

"The men's faces disappeared, with sudden yells, as if they had slipped or been suddenly hurt; and there was a fresh uproar of shouting from the boat. The men were calling to us to come away; to come away. In the same instant, I felt my left boot drawn suddenly and

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forcibly downward, with a horrible painful grip. I wrenched it free, with a yell of angry fear. Forrard of us, I saw that the vile surface was all a-move, and abruptly I found myself shouting in a queer frightened voice:

"'The boat, Captain! The boat, Captain!'

"Captain Gannington stared round at me, over his right shoulder, in a peculiar, dull way, that told me he was utterly dazed with bewilderment and the incomprehensibleness of it all. I took a quick, clogged, nervous step towards him, and gripped his arm and shook it fiercely.

"'The boat!' I shouted at him. 'The boat! For God's sake, tell the men to bring the boat aft!'

"Then the mould must have drawn his feet down; for, abruptly, he bellowed fiercely with terror, his momentary apathy giving place to furious energy. His thick-set, vastly muscular body doubled and whirled with his enormous effort, and he struck out madly, dropping the lantern. He tore his feet free, something ripped as he did so. The *reality* and necessity of the situation had come upon him, brutishly real, and he was roaring to the men in the boat:

"'Bring the boat aft! Bring 'er aft! Bring 'er aft!'

"The second mate and I were shouting the same thing, madly.

"'For God's sake be smart, lads!' roared the captain, and he stooped quickly for his lamp, which still burned. His feet were gripped again, and he hove them out, blaspheming breathlessly, and leaping a yard high with his effort. Then he made a run for the side, wrenching his feet free at each step. In the same instant, the second mate cried out something, and grabbed at the captain.

"'It's got hold of my feet! It's got hold of my feet!' the second mate screamed. His feet had disappeared up to his boot-tops, and Captain Gannington caught him round the waist with his powerful left arm, gave a mighty heave, and the next instant had him free; but both his boot-soles had almost gone.

"For my part, I jumped madly from foot to foot, to avoid the plucking of the mould; and suddenly I made a run for the ship's side. But before I got there, a queer gap came in the mould, between us and the side, at least a couple of feet wide, and how deep I don't know. It closed up in an instant, and all the mould, where the gap had been, went into a sort of flurry of horrible ripplings, so that I ran back from it; for I did not dare to put my foot upon it. Then the captain was shouting at me:

"'Aft, Doctor! Aft, Doctor! This way, Doctor! Run!' I saw then that he had passed me, and was up on the after raised portion of the poop. He had the second mate thrown like a sack, all loose and quiet, over his left shoulder; for Mr. Selvern had fainted, and his long legs flopped, limp and helpless, against the captain's massive knees as the captain ran. I saw, with a queer, unconscious noting of minor details, how the torn soles of the second mate's boots flapped and jigged, as the captain staggered aft.

"'Boat ahoy! Boat ahoy! Boat ahoy!' shouted the captain; and then I was beside him, shouting also. The men were answering with loud yells of encouragement, and it was plain they were working desperately to force the boat aft, through the thick scum about the ship.

"We reached the ancient, mould-hid taffrail, and slewed about, breathlessly, in the half darkness, to see what was happening. Captain Gannington had left his lantern by the big mound, when he picked up the second mate; and as we stood gasping, we discovered suddenly that all the mould between us and the light was full of movement. Yes, the part on which we stood, for about six or eight feet forrard of us was still firm.

"Every couple of seconds, we shouted to the men to hasten, and they kept calling to us that they would be with us in an instant. And all the time, we watched the deck of that dreadful hulk, I felt, for my part, literally sick with mad suspense, and ready to jump overboard into that filthy scum all about us.

"DOWN somewhere in the huge bulk of the ship, there was all the time the extraordinary, dull, ponderous *Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud!* growing ever louder. I seemed to feel the whole hull of the derelict beginning to quiver and thrill with each dull beat. And to me, with the grotesque and monstrous suspicion of what made that noise, it was, at once, the most dreadful and incredible sound I have ever heard.

"As we waited desperately for the boat, I scanned incessantly so much of the gray-white bulk as the lamp showed. The whole of the decks seemed to be in strange movement. Forrard of the lamp I could see, indistinctly, the moundings

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of the mould swaying and nodding hideously, beyond the circle of the brightest rays. Nearer, and full in the glow of the lamp, the mound which should have indicated the skylight, was swelling steadily. There were ugly purple veinings on it, and as it swelled, it seemed to me that the veinings and mottling on it were becoming plainer—rising, as though embossed upon it, as you will see the veins stand out on the body of a powerful full-blooded horse. It was most extraordinary. The mound that we had supposed to cover the companion-way had sunk flat with the surrounding mould, and I could not see that it jetted out any more of the purplish fluid.

"A quaking movement of the mould began, away forward of the lamp, and came flurrying away aft towards us; and at the sight of that, I climbed up on to the spongy-feeling taffrail, and yelled afresh for the boat. The men answered with a shout, which told me they were nearer, but the beastly scum was so thick that it was evidently a fight to move the boat at all. Beside me, Captain Gannington was shaking the second mate furiously, and the man stirred and began to moan. The captain shook him awake.

"'Wake up! Wake up, Mister!' he shouted.

"The second mate staggered out of the captain's arms, and collapsed suddenly, shrieking: 'My feet! Oh, God! My feet!' The captain and I lugged him off the mould, and got him into a sitting position upon the taffrail, where he kept up a continual moaning.

"'Hold 'em, Doctor,' said the Captain, and whilst I did so, he ran forrard a few yards, and peered down over the starboard quarter rail. 'For God's sake, be smart, lads! Be smart! Be smart!' he shouted down to the men; and they answered him, breathless, from close at hand; yet still too far away for the boat to be any use to us on the instant.

"I was holding the moaning, half-unconscious officer, and staring forrard along the poop decks. The flurrying of the mould was coming aft, slowly and noiselessly. And then, suddenly, I saw something closer:

"'Look out, Captain!' I shouted; and even as I shouted, the mould near to him gave a sudden peculiar slobber. I had seen a ripple stealing towards him through the horrible stuff. He gave an enormous, clumsy leap, and landed near to us on the sound part of the mould, but the movement followed him. He turned and faced it, swearing fiercely. All about his feet there came abruptly little gapings, which made horrid sucking noises.

"'Come *back*, Captain!' I yelled. 'Come back, *quick!*' and he stamped insanely at it, and leaped back, his boot torn half off his foot. He swore madly with pain and anger, and jumped swiftly for the taffrail.

"'Come on, Doctor! Over we go!' he called. Then he remembered the filthy scum, and hesitated, roaring out desperately to the men to hurry. I started down, also.

"'The second mate?' I said.

"'I'll take charge, Doctor,' said Captain Gannington, and caught hold of Mr. Selvern. As he spoke, I thought I saw something beneath us, outlined against the scum. I leaned out over the stern, and peered. There was something under the port quarter.

"'There's something down there, Captain!' I called, and pointed in the darkness.

"He stooped far over, and stared.

"'A boat, by gum! A *boat!*' he yelled, and began to wriggle swiftly along the taffrail, dragging the second mate after him. I followed.

"'A boat it is, sure!' he exclaimed, a few moments later, and, picking up the second mate clear of the rail, he hove him down into the boat, where he fell with a crash into the bottom.

"'Over ye go, Doctor!' he yelled at me, and pulled me bodily off the rail, and dropped me after the officer. As he did so, I felt the whole of the ancient, spongy rail give a peculiar sickening quiver, and begin to wobble. I fell onto the second mate, and the captain came after, almost in the same instant; but fortunately he landed clear of us, on to the fore thwart, which broke under his weight, with a loud crack and splintering of wood.

"'Thank God!' I heard him mutter. 'Thank God! . . . I guess that was a mighty near thing to goin' to hell.'

"He struck a match, just as I got to my feet, and between us we got the second mate straightened out on one of the after thwarts. We shouted to the men in the boat, telling them where we were, and saw the light of their lantern shining round to tell us they were doing their best, and then, while we waited, Captain Gannington struck another match, and began to overhaul the boat we had

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dropped into. She was a modern, two-oared boat, and on the stern there was painted *Cyclone Glasgow*. She was in pretty fair condition, and had evidently drifted into the scum and been held by it.

"CAPTAIN GANNINGTON struck several matches, and went forrard toward the derelict. Suddenly he called to me, and I jumped over the thwarts to him.

"'Look, Doctor,' he said; and I saw what he meant—a mass of bones, up in the bow of the boat. I stooped over them and looked. They were the bones of at least three people, all mixed together, in an extraordinary fashion, and quite clean and dry. I had a sudden thought concerning the bones; but I said nothing; for my thought was vague, in some ways, and concerned the grotesque and incredible suggestion that had come to me, as to the cause of that ponderous, dull *Thud! Thud! Thud!* that beat on so infernally within the hull, and was plain to hear even now that we had a sick, horrible, mental picture of that frightful wriggling mound aboard the hulk.

"As Captain Gannington struck a final match I saw something that sickened me, and the captain saw it in the same instant. The match went out, and he fumbled clumsily for another, and struck it. We saw the thing again. We had not been mistaken. . . . A great lip of gray-white was protruding in over the edge of the boat—a great lappet of the mould was coming steadily towards us; a live mess of *the very hull itself*. And suddenly Captain Gannington yelled out, in so many words, the grotesque and incredible thing I was thinking:

"'*She's alive!*'

"I never heard such a sound of *comprehension* and terror in a man's voice. The very horrified assurance of it, made actual to me the thing that, before, had lurked in my subconscious mind. I knew he was right; I knew that the explanation, my reason and my training, both repelled and reached towards, was the true one. . . . I wonder whether anyone can possibly understand our feelings in that moment. . . . The unmitigable horror of it, and the *incredibleness*.

"As the light of the match burned up fully, I saw that the mass of living matter, coming towards us, was streaked and veined with purple, the veins standing out, enormously distended. The whole

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thing quivered continuously to each ponderous *Thud! Thud! Thud!* of that gargantuan organ that pulsed within the huge gray-white hulk. The flame of the match reached the captain's fingers, and there came to me a little sickly whiff of burned flesh; but he seemed unconscious of any pain. Then the flame went out, in a brief sizzle, yet at the last moment, I had seen an extraordinary raw look, become visible upon the end of that monstrous, protruding lappet. It had become dewed with a hideous, purplish sweat. And with the darkness, there came a sudden charnel-like stench.

"I heard the match-box split in Captain Gannington's hands, as he wrenched it open. Then he swore, in a queer frightened voice; for he had come to the end of his matches. He turned clumsily in the darkness, and tumbled over the nearest thwart, in his eagerness to get to the stern of the boat, and I after him; for he knew that thing was coming towards us through the darkness, reaching over that piteous mingled heap of human bones, all jumbled together in the bows. We shouted madly to the men, and for answer saw the bows of the boat emerge dimly into view, round the starboard counter of the derelict.

"'Thank God!' I gasped out; but Captain Gannington yelled to them to show a light. Yet this they could not do, for the lamp had just been stepped on, in their desperate efforts to force the boat around to us.

"'Quick! Quick!' I shouted.

"'For God's sake be smart, men!' roared the captain; and both of us faced the darkness under the port counter, out of which we knew (but could not see) the thing was coming toward us.

"'An oar! Smart now; pass me an oar!' shouted the captain; and reached out his hand through the gloom toward the oncoming boat. I saw a figure stand up in the bows, and hold something out to us, across the intervening yards of scum. Captain Gannington swept his hands through the darkness, and encountered it.

"'I've got it. Let go there!' he said, in a quick, tense voice.

"IN THE same instant, the boat we were in was pressed over suddenly to starboard by some tremendous weight. Then I heard the captain shout: 'Duck y'r head, Doctor,' and directly afterwards he swung the heavy, fourteen-foot ash oar round his head, and struck into the darkness. There came a sudden squelch, and he struck again, with a savage grunt of fierce energy. At the second blow, the boat righted, with a slow movement, and directly afterwards the other boat bumped gently into ours.

"Captain Gannington dropped the oar, and springing across to the second mate, hove him up off the thwart, and pitched him with knee and arms clear in over the bows among the men; then he shouted to me to follow, which I did, and he came after me, bringing the oar with him. We carried the second mate aft, and the captain shouted to the men to back the boat a little; then they got her bows clear of the boat we had just left, and so headed out through the scum for the open sea.

"'Where's Tom 'Arrison?' gasped one of the men, in the midst of his exertions. He happened to be Tom Harrison's particular chum; and Captain Gannington answered him briefly enough:

"'Dead! Pull! Don't talk!'

"Now, difficult as it had been to force the boat through the scum to our rescue, the difficulty to get clear seemed tenfold. After some five minutes pulling, the boat seemed hardly to have moved a fathom, if so much; and a quite dreadful fear took me afresh; which one of the panting men put suddenly into words:

"'It's got us!' he gasped out; 'same as poor Tom!' It was the man who had inquired where Harrison was.

"'Shut y'r mouth and *pull!*' roared the captain. And so another few minutes passed. Abruptly, it seemed to me that the dull, ponderous *Thud! Thud! Thud!* came more plainly through the dark, and I stared intently over the stern. I sickened a little; for I could almost swear that the dark mass of the monster was actually *nearer* . . . that it was coming nearer to us through the darkness. Captain Gannington must have had the same thought; for after a brief look into the darkness, he made one jump to the stroke-oar, and began to double bank it.

"'Get forrid under the thwarts, Doctor!' he said to me, rather breathlessly. 'Get in the bows, an' see if you can't free the stuff a bit round the bows.'

"I did as he told me, and a minute later I was in the bows of the boat, puddling the scum from side to side with the boat-hook, and trying to break up the viscid, clinging muck. A heavy, almost animal-like odor rose off it, and all the air seemed

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full of the deadening smell. I shall never find words to tell any one the whole horror of it—the threat that seemed to hang in the very air around us; and, but a little astern, that incredible thing, coming, as I firmly believe, nearer, and the scum holding us like half-melted glue.

"The minutes passed in a deadly, eternal fashion, and I kept staring back.

"Abruptly, Captain Gannington sang out:

" 'We're gaining, lads. Pull!' And I felt the boat forge ahead perceptibly, as they gave way, with renewed hope and energy. There was soon no doubt of it; for presently that hideous *Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud!* had grown quite dim and vague somewhat astern, and I could no longer see the derelict, for the night had come down tremendously dark, and all the sky was thick overset with heavy clouds. As we drew nearer and nearer to the edge of the scum, the boat moved more and more freely, until suddenly we emerged with a clean, sweet, fresh sound, into the open sea.

" 'Thank God!' I said aloud, and drew in the boat-hook, and made my way aft again to where Captain Gannington now sat once more at the tiller. I saw him looking anxiously up at the sky, and across to where the lights of our vessel burned, and again he would seem to listen intently; so that I found myself listening also.

" 'What's that, Captain?' I said sharply; for it seemed to me that I heard a sound far astern, something between a queer whine and a low whistling. 'What's that?'

" 'It's the wind, Doctor,' he said, in a low voice. 'I wish to God we were aboard.'

"Then, to the men: 'Pull! Put y'r backs into it, or ye'll never put y'r teeth through good bread again!'

"The men obeyed nobly, and we reached the vessel safely, and had the boat safely stowed, before the storm came, which it did in a furious white smother out of the west. I could see it for some minutes beforehand, tearing the sea, in the gloom, into a wall of phosphorescent foam; and as it came nearer, that peculiar whining, piping sound grew louder and louder, until it was like a vast steam-whistle, rushing towards us across the sea.

"And when it did come, we got it very heavy indeed; so that the morning showed us nothing but a welter of white seas; and that grim derelict was many a score of miles away in the smother, lost as utterly as our hearts could wish to lose her.

When I came to examine the second mate's feet, I found them in a very extraordinary condition. The soles of them had the appearance of having been partly digested. I know of no other word that so exactly describes their condition; and the agony the man suffered, must have been dreadful.

"NOW," concluded the doctor, "that is what I call a case in point. If we could know exactly what that old vessel had originally been loaded with, and the juxtaposition of the various articles of her cargo, plus the heat and time she had endured, plus one or two other only guessable quantities, we should have solved the chemistry of the Life-Force, gentlemen. Not necessarily the *origin*, mind you; but, at least, we should have taken a big step on the way.

"I've often regretted that gale, you know—in a way, that is, in a way! It was a most amazing discovery; but, at the time, I had nothing but thankfulness to be rid of it. . . . A most amazing chance. I often think of the way the monster woke out of its torpor. And that scum. . . . The dead pigs caught in it. . . . I fancy that was a grim kind of net, gentlemen. . . . It caught many things. . . . It. . . ."

The old doctor sighed and nodded.

"If I could have had her bill of lading," he said, his eyes full of regret. "If— It might have told me something to help. But, anyway. . . ." He began to fill his pipe again. "I suppose," he ended, looking round at us gravely, "I s'pose we humans are an ungrateful lot of beggars, at the best!

"But what a chance! What a chance—eh?"

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The Editor's Page

SINCE the change in our source of selection in the field of celebrated fantasy stories, *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* has become more popular than ever. The flood of congratulatory mail which we have extended the Readers' Viewpoint department to accommodate, speaks more eloquently than could any words from the editor.

●

In this issue we have given you a short story, "The Derelict", as a curtain raiser for the long novel, "The Ghost Pirates", which is to appear in a later issue early in the new year.

H. P. Lovecraft has placed William Hope Hodgson's work high in the ranks of British fantastic literature, and while the actual copies of his books are extremely rare, the fantasy field has always recognized him as one of the great writers of our kind of tale.

●

The next issue to come will feature "The Man Who Was Thursday" by G. K. Chesterton, with illustrations by Lawrence. This story is known as one of the great mystery stories, and it is indubitably fantastic, in the finest sense of the word. It seems appropriate that this story should appear in a magazine by the name of ours.

●

We are proud to announce that two of our artists, Virgil Finlay and Frank R. Paul are each and both serving the government of Uncle Sam. We will miss them both and shall be very happy when they return, but in the meantime Lawrence and Bok are doing a very fine job for F. F. M.

●

The Finlay portfolios are going out to the fans with great speed, but there are a few left for those who get their orders in in time. It will probably be quite a while before we will have another Finlay collection, as only two issues have come out since the last one was assembled.

● ● ●

Keep your letters and suggestions rolling in, and give us your opinions freely. One of the greatest prides of F. F. M. is its interesting letter department—one which is probably unique in magazine departments because of the common viewpoint of these readers concerning the best in selected fantasy, and the unusual interest which they take in appreciating or criticizing our stories.

● ● ●

In signing off, let us thank you for the splendid support and encouragement which you readers have given *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* during the necessary changes which it has gone through. Everything is well with us, and the future promises a fine long line of excellent fantasy in our pages, many of which were suggested by our readers.

Mary Gnaedinger

EDITOR

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THE MASK

By Robert W. Chambers

Barred from life and death alike, she waited—waited for the key that could unlock the sinister talisman which held her prisoner of eternity.

ALTHOUGH I knew nothing of chemistry, I listened fascinated. He picked up an Easter lily which Genevieve had brought that morning from Notre Dame and dropped it into the basin. Instantly the liquid lost its crystalline clearness. For a second the lily was enveloped in a milk-white foam, which disappeared, leaving the fluid opalescent.

Changing tints of orange and crimson played over the surface, and then what seemed to be a ray of pure sunlight struck through from the bottom where the lily was resting. At the same instant he plunged his hand into the basin and drew out the flower.

"There is no danger," he explained, "if you choose the right moment. That golden ray is the signal."

Presented from "The King in Yellow," through the courtesy of The Appleton-Century Company.
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He held the lily towards me and I took it in my hand. It had turned to stone, to the purest marble.

"You see," he said, "it is without a flaw. What sculptor could reproduce it?"

The marble was white as snow; but in its depths the veins of the lily were tinged with palest azure, and a faint flush lingered deep in its heart.

"Don't ask me the reason of that," he smiled, noticing my wonder. "I have no idea why the veins and heart are tinted, but they always are. Yesterday I tried one of Genevieve's goldfish—there it is."

The fish looked as if sculptured in marble. But if you held it to the light the stone was beautifully veined with a faint blue, and from somewhere within came a rosy light like the tint which slumbers in an opal. I looked into the basin. Once more it seemed filled with clearest crystal.

"If I should touch it now?" I demanded.

"I don't know," he replied, "but you had better not try."

"There is one thing I'm curious about," I said, "and that is where the ray of sunlight came from."

"It looked like a sunbeam, true enough," he said. "I don't know, it always comes when I immerse any living thing. Perhaps," he continued, smiling—"perhaps it is the vital spark of the creature escaping to the source whence it came."

I saw he was mocking, and threatened him with a mahlstick; but he only laughed and changed the subject.

"Stay to lunch. Genevieve will be here directly."

"I saw her going to early mass," I said, "and she looked as fresh and sweet as that lily—before you destroyed it."

"Do you think I destroyed it?" said Boris, gravely.

"Destroyed, preserved, how can we tell?"

We sat in the corner of a studio near his unfinished group of "The Fates." He leaned back on the sofa, twirling a sculptor's chisel and squinting at his work.

"By the way," he said, "I have finished pointing up that old academic 'Ariadne,' and I suppose it will have to go to the Salon. It's all I have ready this year, but after the success the 'Madonna' brought me I feel ashamed to send a thing like that."

The "Madonna," an exquisite marble, for which Genevieve had sat, had been the sensation of last year's Salon. I looked at the "Ariadne." It was a magnificent piece of technical work; but I agreed with Boris that the world would expect something better of him than that. Still, it was impossible not to think of finishing in time for the Salon that splendid, terrible group half shrouded in the marble behind me. "The Fates" would have to wait.

We were proud of Boris Yvain. We claimed him and he claimed us on the strength of his having been born in America, although his father was French and his mother was a Russian. Every one in the Beaux Arts called him Boris. And yet there were only two of us whom he addressed in the same familiar way—Jack Scott and myself.

Perhaps my being in love with Genevieve had something to do with his affection for me. Not that it had ever been acknowledged between us. But after all was settled, and she had told me with tears in her eyes that it was Boris whom she loved, I went over to his house and congratulated him. The perfect cordiality of that interview did not deceive either of us, I always believed, although to one at least it was a great comfort. I do not think he and Genevieve ever spoke of the matter together, but Boris knew.

Genevieve was lovely. The Madonna-like purity of her face might have been inspired by the "Santus" in Gounod's Mass. But I was always glad when she changed that mood for what we called her "April Maneuvers." She was often as variable as an April day. In the morning grave, dignified, and sweet; at noon laughing, capricious; at evening whatever one least expected. I preferred her so rather than in that Madonna-like tranquillity which stirred the depths of my heart. I was dreaming of Genevieve when he spoke again.

"What do you think of my discovery, Alex?"

"I think it wonderful."

"I shall make no use of it, you know, beyond satisfying my own curiosity so far as may be, and the secret will die with me."

"It would be rather a blow to sculpture, would it not? We painters lose more than we ever gain by photography."

Boris nodded, playing with the edge of the chisel.

"This new, vicious discovery would corrupt the world of art. No. I shall never

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confide the secret to anyone," he said, slowly.

IT WOULD be hard to find anyone less informed about such phenomena than myself; but of course I had heard of mineral springs so saturated with silica that the leaves and twigs which fell into them were turned to stone after a time. I dimly comprehended the process, how the silica replaced the vegetable matter, atom by atom, and the result was a duplicate of the object in stone.

This I confess had never interested me greatly, and, as for the ancient fossils thus produced, they disgusted me. Boris, it appeared, feeling curiosity instead of repugnance, had investigated the subject, and had accidentally stumbled on a solution which, attacking the immersed object with a ferocity unheard of, in a second did the work of years. This was all I could make out of the strange story he had just been telling me. He spoke again after a long silence.

"I am almost frightened when I think what I have found. Scientists would go mad over the discovery. It was so simple, too; it discovered itself. When I think of that formula, and that new element precipitated in metallic scales—"

"What new element?"

"Oh, I haven't thought of naming it, and I don't believe I ever shall. There are enough precious metals now in the world to cut throats over."

I pricked up my ears. "Have you struck gold, Boris?"

"No, better; but see here, Alec!" he laughed, starting up. "You and I have all we need in this world. Ah! how sinister and covetous you look already!" I laughed, too, and told him I was devoured by the desire for gold, and we had better talk of something else; so, when Genevieve came in shortly after, we had turned our backs on alchemy.

Genevieve was dressed in silvery gray. The light glinted along the soft curves of her fair hair as she turned her cheek to Boris; then she saw me and returned my greeting. She had never before failed to blow me a kiss from the tips of her white fingers, and I promptly complained of the omission. She smiled and held out her hand, which dropped almost before it had touched mine; then she said, looking at Boris:

"You must ask Alec to stay for luncheon." This also was something new. She had always asked me herself until today.

"I did," said Boris, shortly.

"And you said yes, I hope." She turned to me with a charming conventional smile. I might have been an acquaintance of the day before yesterday. I made her a bow. *"J'avais bien l'honneur, madame"*; but, refusing to take up our usual bantering tone, she murmured a hospitable commonplace and disappeared. Boris and I looked at each other

"I had better go home, don't you think?" I asked.

"Hanged if I know," he replied, frankly.

While we were discussing the advisability of my departure, Genevieve reappeared in the door-way without her hat. She was wonderfully beautiful, but her color was too deep and her lovely eyes were too bright. She came straight up to me and took my arm.

"Luncheon is ready. Was I cross, Alec? I thought I had a headache, but I haven't. Come here, Boris," and she slipped her other arm through his. "Alec knows that, after you, there is no one in the world whom I like as well as I like him, so if he sometimes feels snubbed it won't hurt him."

"À la bonheur!" I cried; "who says there are no thunder-storms in April?"

"Are you ready?" changed Boris. "Aye ready"; and arm-in-arm we raced into the dining-room, scandalizing the servants. After all, we were not so much to blame; Genevieve was eighteen, Boris twenty-three, and I not quite twenty-one.

SOME work that I was doing about this time on the decorations for Genevieve's boudoir kept me constantly at the quaint little hotel in the Rue Sainte-Cecile. Boris and I in those days labored hard, but as we pleased, which was fitfully, and we all three, with Jack Scott, idled a great deal together.

One quiet afternoon I had been wandering alone over the house examining curios, prying into odd corners, bringing out sweetmeats and cigars from strange hiding-places, and at last I stopped in the bathing-room. Boris, all over clay, stood there washing his hands.

The room was built of rose-colored marble, excepting the floor, which was tessellated in rose and gray. In the center was a square pool sunken below the surface of the floor; steps led down into it; sculptured pillars supported a frescoed ceiling. A delicious marble Cupid appeared to have just alighted on his ped-

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estal at the upper end of the room. The whole interior was Boris' work and mine. Boris, in his working clothes of white canvas, scraped the traces of clay and red modelling-wax from his handsome hands and coquetted over his shoulder with the Cupid.

"I see you," he insisted; "don't try to look the other way and pretend not to see me. You know who made you, little humbug!"

It was always my rôle to interpret Cupid's sentiments in these conversations, and when my turn came I responded in such a manner that Boris seized my arm and dragged me towards the pool, declaring he would duck me. Next instant he dropped my arm and turned pale. "Good God!" he said. "I forgot the pool is full of the solution!"

I shivered a little, and dryly advised him to remember better where he had stored the precious liquid.

"In Heaven's name, why do you keep a small lake of that gruesome stuff here of all places?" I asked.

"I want to experiment on something large," he replied.

"On me, for instance!"

"Ah! that came too close for jesting; but I do want to watch the action of that solution on a more highly organized living body; there is that big, white rabbit," he said, following me into the studio.

Jack Scott, wearing a paint-stained jacket, came wandering in, appropriated all the Oriental sweetmeats he could lay his hands on, looted the cigarette-case, and finally he and Boris disappeared together to visit the Luxembourg Gallery, where a new silver bronze by Rodin and a landscape of Monet's were claiming the exclusive attention of artistic France.

I went back to the studio and resumed my work. It was a Renaissance screen, which Boris wanted me to paint for Genevieve's boudoir. But the small boy who was unwillingly dawdling through a series of poses for it today refused all bribes to be good. He never rested an instant in the same position, and inside of five minutes I had as many different outlines of the little beggar.

"Are you posing or are you executing a song and dance, my friend?" I inquired.

"Whichever monsieur pleases," he replied, with an angelic smile.

Of course I dismissed him for the day, and of course I paid him for the full time, that being the way we spoil our models.

After the young imp had gone, I made a few perfunctory daubs at my work, but was so thoroughly out of humor that it took me the rest of the afternoon to undo the damage I had done, so at last I scraped my palette, stuck my brushes in a bowl of black soap, and strolled into the smoking-room. I really believe that, excepting Genevieve's apartments, no room in the house was so free from the perfume of tobacco as this one.

It was a queer chaos of odds and ends hung with thread-bare tapestry. A sweet-toned old spinet in good repair stood by the window. There were stands of weapons, some old and dull, others bright and modern, festoons of Indian and Turkish armor over the mantel, two or three good pictures, and a pipe-rack. It was here that we used to come for new sensations in smoking. I doubt if any type of pipe ever existed which was not represented in that rack.

When we had selected one, we immediately carried it somewhere else and smoked it; for the place was, on the whole, more gloomy and less inviting than any in the house. But this afternoon the twilight was very soothing; the rugs and skins on the floor looked brown and soft and drowsy; the big couch was piled with cushions. I found my pipe and curled up there for an unaccustomed smoke in the smoking-room. I had chosen one with a long, flexible stem, and, lighting it, fell to dreaming. After a while it went out; but I did not stir. I dreamed on and presently fell asleep.

I awoke to the saddest music I had ever heard. The room was quite dark; I had no idea what time it was. A ray of moonlight silvered one edge of the old spinet, and the polished wood seemed to exhale the sounds as perfume floats above a box of sandal-wood. Someone rose in the darkness and came away weeping quietly, and I was fool enough to cry out, "Genevieve!"

She dropped at my voice, and I had time to curse myself while I made a light and tried to raise her from the floor. She shrank away with a murmur of pain. She was very quiet, and asked for Boris. I carried her to the divan, and went to look for him; but he was not in the house, and the servants were gone to bed. Perplexed and anxious, I hurried back to Genevieve. She lay where I had left her, looking very white.

"I can't find Boris nor any of the servants," I said.

"I know," she answered, faintly, "Boris

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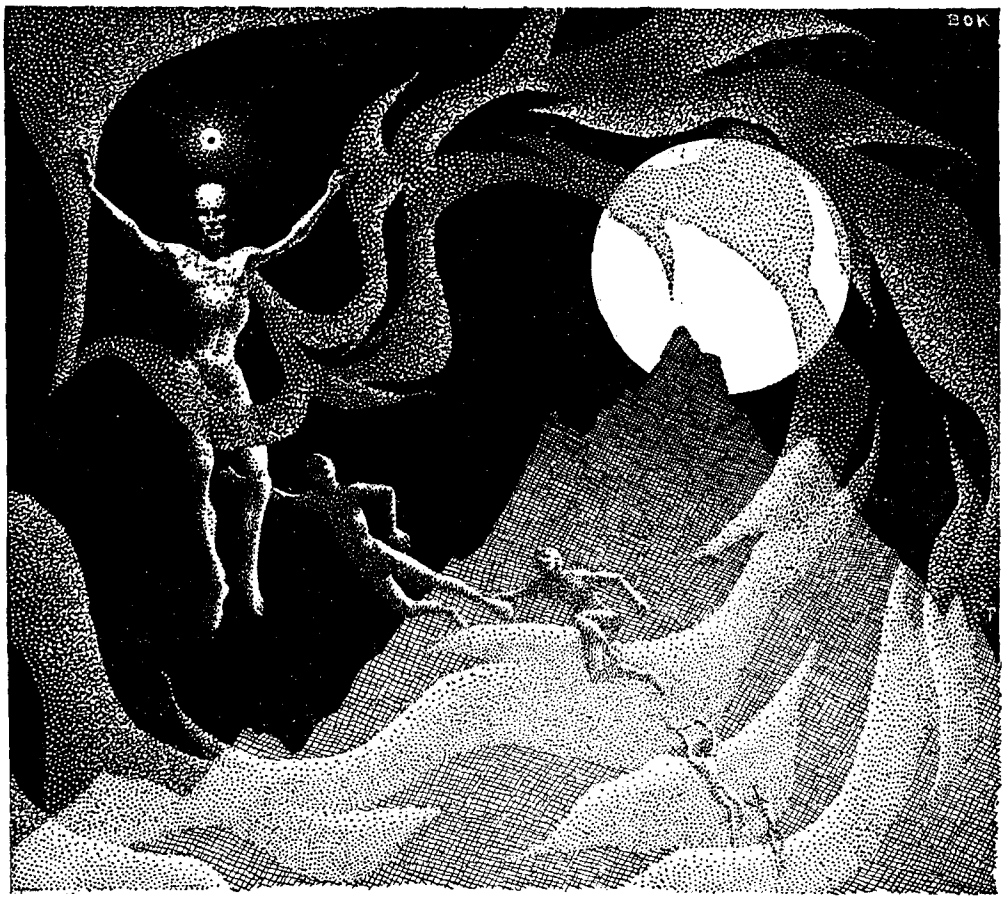

"I thought of the King in Yellow, wrapped in the fantastic colors of his tattered mantle, and of lost Carcosa that lies beyond the moon."

has gone to Ept with Mr. Scott. I did not remember when I sent you for him just now."

"But he can't get back in that case before tomorrow afternoon, and—are you hurt? Did I frighten you into falling? What an awful fool I am, but I was only half awake."

"Boris thought you had gone home before dinner. Do please excuse us for letting you stay here all this time."

"I have had a long nap," I laughed "so sound that I did not know whether I was still asleep or not when I found myself staring at a figure that was moving towards me, and called out your name. Have you been trying the old spinet? You must have played very softly."

I would tell a thousand more lies worse than that one to see the look of relief that came into her face. She smiled adorably and said, in her natural voice: "Alec, I tripped on that wolf's head, and I think my ankle is sprained. Please call Marie and then go home."

I did as she bade me, and left her there when the maid came in.

AT NOON next day when I called, I found Boris walking restlessly about his studio.

"Genevieve is asleep just now," he told me; "the sprain is nothing, but why should she have such a high fever? The doctor can't account for it; or else he will not," he muttered.

"Genevieve has a fever?" I asked.

"I should say so, and has actually been a little lightheaded at intervals all night. The idea!—gay little Genevieve, without a care in the world—and she keeps say-

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ing her heart's broken and she wants to die!"

My own heart stood still.

Boris leaned against the door of his studio, looking down, his hands in his pockets, his kind, keen eyes clouded, a new line of trouble drawn "over the mouth's good mark, that made the smile." The maid had orders to summon him the instant Genevieve opened her eyes. We waited and waited, and Boris, growing restless, wandered about, fussing with modelling-wax and red clay. Suddenly he started for the next room. "Come and see my rose-colored bath full of death," he cried.

"Is it death?" I asked, to humor his mood.

"You are not prepared to call it life, I suppose," he answered. As he spoke he plucked a solitary goldfish squirming and twisting out of its globe. "We'll send this one after the other—wherever that is," he said. There was feverish excitement in his voice. A dull weight of fever lay on my limbs and on my brain as I followed him to the fair crystal pool with its pink-tinted sides; and he dropped the creature in.

Falling, its scales flashed with a hot, orange gleam in its angry twistings and contortions; the moment it struck the liquid it became rigid and sank heavily to the bottom. Then came the milky foam, the splendid hues radiating on the surface, and then the shaft of pure, serene light broke through from seemingly infinite depths. Boris plunged in his hand and drew out an exquisite marble thing, blue veined, rose tinted, and glistening with opalescent drops.

"Child's play," he muttered, and looked wearily, longingly, at me—as if I could answer such questions! But Jack Scott came in and entered into the "game," as he called it, with ardor. Nothing would do but to try the experiment on the white rabbit then and there. I was willing that Boris should find distraction from his cares, but I hated to see the life go out of a warm, living creature, and I declined to be present.

Picking up a book at random, I sat down in the studio to read. Alas, I had found "The King in Yellow." After a few moments, which seemed ages, I was putting it away with a nervous shudder, when Boris and Jack came in, bringing their marble rabbit. At the same time the bell rang above and a cry came from the sick-room. Boris was gone like a flash, and the next moment he called: "Jack, run for the doctor; bring him back with you. Alec, come here."

I went and stood at her door. A frightened maid came out in haste and ran away to fetch some remedy. Genevieve, sitting bolt upright, with crimson cheeks and glittering eyes, babbled incessantly and resisted Boris's gentle restraint. He called me to help. At my first touch she sighed and sank back, closing her eyes, and then—then—as we still bent above her, she opened them again, looked straight into Boris's face, poor, fever-crazed girl, and told her secret.

At the same instant our three lives turned into new channels; the bond that had held us so long together snapped forever, and a new bond was forged in its place, for she had spoken my name, and, as the fever tortured her, her heart poured out its load of hidden sorrow. Amazed and dumb, I bowed my head, while my face burned like a live coal, and the blood surged in my ears, stupefying me with its clamor.

Incapable of movement, incapable of speech, I listened to her feverish words in an agony of shame and sorrow. I could not silence her, I could not look at Boris. Then I felt an arm upon my shoulder, and Boris turned a bloodless face to mine.

"It is not your fault, Alec; don't grieve so if she loves you—" But he could not finish; and as the doctor stepped swiftly into the room, saying, "Ah, the fever!" I seized Jack Scott and hurried him to the street, saying, "Boris would rather be alone." We crossed the street to our own apartments, and that night, seeing I was going to be ill, too, he went for the doctor again. The last thing I recollect with any distinctness was hearing Jack say, "For Heaven's sake, doctor, what ails him, to wear a face like that?" and I thought of "The King in Yellow" and the Pallid Mask.

I was very ill, for the strain of two years which I had endured since that fatal May morning when Genevieve murmured, "I love you, but I think I love Boris best," told on me at last. I had never imagined that it could become more than I could endure.

Outwardly tranquil, I had deceived myself. Although the inward battle raged night after night, and I, lying alone in my room, cursed myself for rebellious thoughts unloyal to Boris and unworthy of Genevieve, the morning always brought

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relief, and I returned to Genevieve and to my dear Boris with a heart washed clean by the tempests of the night.

Never in word or deed or thought while with them had I betrayed my sorrow even to myself.

THE mask of self-deception was no longer a mask for me; it was a part of me. Night lifted it, laying bare the stifled truth below; but there was no one to see except myself, and when day broke the mask fell back again of its own accord. These thoughts passed through my troubled mind as I lay sick, but they were hopelessly entangled with visions of white creatures heavy as stone, crawling about in Boris' basin—of the wolf's head on the rug, foaming and snapping at Genevieve, who lay smiling beside it.

I thought too, of the King in Yellow wrapped in the fantastic colors of his tattered mantle, and that bitter cry of Cassilda, "Not upon us, O King, not upon us!" Feverishly I struggled to put it from me, but I saw the Lake of Hali, thin and blank, without a ripple or wind to stir it, and I saw the towers of Carcosa behind the moon. Aldebaran, the Hyades, Alar, Hastur, glided through the cloud rifts which fluttered and flapped as they passed like the scalloped tatters of the King in Yellow. Among all these, one sane thought persisted. It never wavered, no matter what else was going on in my disordered mind, that my chief reason for existing was to meet some requirement of Boris and Genevieve.

What this obligation was, its nature, was never clear; sometimes it seemed to be protection, sometimes support, through a great crisis. Whatever it seemed to be for the time, its weight rested only on me, and I was never so ill or so weak that I did not respond with my whole soul. There were always crowds of faces about me, mostly strange, but a few I recognized, Boris among them.

Afterwards they told me that this could not have been, but I know that once at least he bent over me. It was only a touch, a faint echo of his voice, then the clouds settled back on my senses, and I lost him, but he *did* stand there and bend over me *once* at least.

At last, one morning I awoke to find the sunlight falling across my bed, and Jack Scott reading beside me. I had not strength enough to speak aloud, neither could I think, much less remember, but I could smile feebly as Jack's eyes met mine, and, when he jumped up and asked eagerly if I wanted anything, I could whisper, "Yes, Boris." Jack moved to the head of my bed, and leaned down to arrange my pillow; I did not see his face, but he answered, heartily, "You must wait, Alec, you are too weak to see even Boris."

I waited and I grew strong; in a few days I was able to see whom I would, but meanwhile I had thought and remembered. From the moment when all the past grew clear again in my mind, I never doubted what I should do when the time came, and I felt sure that Boris would have resolved upon the same course so far as he was concerned; as for what pertained to me alone, I knew he would see that also as I did. I no longer asked for anyone. I never inquired why no message came from them; why, during the week I lay there, waiting and growing stronger, I never heard their names spoken.

Preoccupied with my own searchings for the right way, and with my feeble but determined fight against despair, I simply acquiesced in Jack's reticence, taking for granted that he was afraid to speak of them, lest I should turn unruly and insist on seeing them. Meanwhile I said over and over to myself how it would be when life began again for us all. We would take up our relations exactly as they were before Genevieve fell ill. Boris and I would look into each other's eyes, and there would be neither rancor nor cowardice nor mistrust in that glance.

I would be with them again for a little while in the dear intimacy of their home, and then, without pretext or explanation, I would disappear from their lives forever. Boris would know; Genevieve—the only comfort was that she would never know. It seemed, as I thought it over, that I had found the meaning of that sense of obligation which had persisted all through my delirium, and the only possible answer to it. So when I was quite ready, I beckoned Jack to me one day, and said:

"Jack, I want Boris at once, and take my dearest greeting to Genevieve. . . ."

WHEN at last he made me understand that they were both dead, I fell into a wild rage that tore all my little convalescent strength to atoms. I raved and cursed myself into a relapse, from which I crawled forth some weeks afterwards a boy of twenty-one who believed that his

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youth was gone forever. I seemed to be past the capability of further suffering, and one day, when Jack handed me a letter and the keys to Boris's house, I took them without a tremor and asked him to tell me all.

It was cruel of me to ask him, but there was no help for it, and he leaned wearily on his thin hands to reopen the wound which could never entirely heal. He began very quietly.

"Alec, unless you have a clue that I know nothing about, you will not be able to explain any more than I what has happened. I suspect that you would rather not hear these details, but you must learn them, else I would spare you the relation. God knows I wish I could be spared the telling. I shall use few words.

"That day when I left you in the doctor's care and came back to Boris, I found him working on 'The Fates.' Genevieve, he said, was sleeping under the influence of drugs. She had been quite out of her mind, he said. He kept on working, not talking any more, and I watched him.

"Before long I saw that the third figure of the group—the one looking straight ahead, out over the world—bore his face; not as you ever saw it, but as it looked then and to the end. This is one thing for which I should like to find an explanation, but I never shall.

"Well, he worked and I watched him in silence, and we went on that way until nearly midnight. Then we heard a door open and shut sharply, and a swift rush in the next room. Boris sprang through the doorway, and I followed; but we were too late. She lay at the bottom of the pool, her hands across her breast. Then Boris shot himself through the heart."

Jack stopped speaking, drops of sweat stood under his eyes, and his thin cheeks twitched.

"I carried Boris to his room. Then I went back and let that hellish fluid out of the pool, and, turning on all the water, washed the marble clean of every drop. When at length I dared descend the steps, I found her lying there as white as snow. At last, when I had decided what was best to do, I went into the laboratory, and first emptied the solution in the basin into the waste-pipe; then I poured the contents of every jar and bottle after it.

"There was wood in the fireplace, so I built a fire, and, breaking the locks of Boris's cabinet, I burned every paper, note-book, and letter that I found there. With a mallet from the studio I smashed to pieces all the empty bottles, then, loading them into a coal-scuttle, I carried them to the cellar and threw them over the red-hot bed of the furnace.

"Six times I made the journey, and at last not a vestige remained of anything which might again aid one seeking for the formula which Boris had found. Then at last I dared call the doctor. He is a good man, and together we struggled to keep it from the public. Without him I never could have succeeded. At last we got the servants paid and sent away into the country, where old Rosier keeps them quiet with stories of Boris's and Genevieve's travel in distant lands, whence they will not return for years. We buried Boris in the little cemetery of Sevres. The doctor is a good creature, and knows when to pity a man who can bear no more. He gave his certificate of heart disease and asked no questions of me."

Then, lifting his head from his hands, he said, "Open the letter, Alec; it is for us both."

I tore it open. It was Boris's will, dated a year before. He left everything to Genevieve, and, in case of her dying childless, I was to take control of the house in the Rue Sainte-Cecile, and Jack Scott the management at Ept. On our deaths the property reverted to his mother's family in Russia, with the exception of the sculptured marbles executed by himself. These he left to me.

The page blurred under our eyes, and Jack got up and walked to the window. Presently he returned and sat down again. I dreaded to hear what he was going to say; but he spoke with the same simplicity and gentleness.

"Genevieve lies before the 'Madonna' in the marble-room. The 'Madonna' bends tenderly above her, and Genevieve smiles back into that calm face that never would have been except for her."

His voice broke, but he grasped my hand, saying, "Courage, Alec." Next morning he left for Ept to fulfil his trust.

THE same evening I took the keys and went into the house I had known so well. Everything was in order, but the silence was terrible. Though I went twice to the door of the marble-room, I could not force myself to enter. It was beyond my strength. I went into the smoking-

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room and sat down before the spinet. A small handkerchief lay on the keys, and I turned away, choking.

"It was plain I could not stay, so I locked every door, every window, and the three front and back gates, and went away. Next morning Alcide packed my valise, and, leaving him in charge of my apartments, I took the Orient express for Constantinople. During the two years that I wandered through the East, at first, in our letters, we never mentioned Genevieve and Boris, but gradually their names crept in. I recollect particularly a passage in one of Jack's letters replying to one of mine:

"What you tell me of seeing Boris bending over you while you lay ill, and feeling his touch on your face and hearing his voice, of course troubles me. This that you described must have happened a fortnight after he died. I say to myself that you were dreaming, that it was part of your delirium, but the explanation does not satisfy me, nor would it you."

Towards the end of the second year a letter came from Jack to me in India so unlike anything that I had ever known of him that I decided to return at once to Paris. He wrote: "I am well, and sell all my pictures, as artists do who have no need of money. I have not a care of my own; but I am more restless than if I had. I am unable to shake off a strange anxiety about you. It is not apprehension, it is rather a breathless expectancy—of what, God knows! I can only say it is wearing me out.

"Nights I dream always of you and Boris. I can never recall anything afterwards; but I wake in the morning with my heart beating, and all day the excitement increases until I fall asleep at night to recall the same experience. I am quite exhausted by it, and have determined to break up this morbid condition. I must see you. Shall I go to Bombay or will you come to Paris?"

I telegraphed him to expect me by the next steamer.

When we met I thought he had changed very little; I, he insisted, looked in splendid health. It was good to hear his voice again, and as we sat and chatted about what life still held for us we felt that it was pleasant to be alive in the bright spring weather.

We stayed in Paris together a week, and then I went for a week to Ept with

He came from nowhere and he wasn't very big—and what there was of him was mostly mouth—but he was the scorching answer to—

ELEVEN MEN AND A PRAYER

They caught his passes, or he threw 'em down their throats; and when they murdered him—he begged for more! He was the biggest little guy any pro league had ever seen—he had to be, to teach the meaning of victory to a team that had never won a game!

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him, but first of all we went to the cemetery at Sevres, where Boris lay.

"Shall we place 'The Fates' in the little grove above him?" Jack asked, and I answered:

"I think only the 'Madonna' should watch over Boris's grave." But Jack was none the better for my home-coming. The dreams, of which he could not retain even the least definite outline, continued, and he said at times the sense of breathless expectancy was suffocating.

"You see, I do you harm and not good," I said. "Try a change without me." So he started alone for a ramble among the Channel Islands, and I went back to Paris. I had not yet entered Boris's house, now mine, since my return, but I knew it must be done. It had been kept in order by Jack; there were servants there, so I gave up my own apartment and went there to live. Instead of the agitation I had feared, I found myself able to paint there tranquilly. I visited all the rooms —all but one. I could not bring myself to enter the marble-room, where Genevieve lay, and yet I felt the longing growing daily to look upon her face, to kneel beside her.

One April afternoon I lay dreaming in the smoking-room, just as I had lain two years before, and mechanically I looked among the tawny Eastern rugs for the wolf-skin. At last I distinguished the pointed ears and flat, cruel head, and I thought of my dream, where I saw Genevieve lying beside it. The helmets still hung against the threadbare tapestry, among them the old Spanish morion, which I remembered Genevieve had once put on when we were amusing ourselves with the ancient bits of mail.

I turned my eyes to the spinet; every yellow key seemed eloquent of her caressing hand, and I rose, drawn by the strength of my life's passion to the sealed door of the marble-room. The heavy doors swung inward under my trembling hands. Sunlight poured through the window, tipping with gold the wings of Cupid, and lingered like a nimbus over the brows of the "Madonna," and yet, through her white arms, I saw the pale azure vein, and beneath her softly clasped hands the folds of her dress were tinged with rose, as if from some faint, warm light within her breast.

Bending, with a breaking heart, I touched the marble drapery with my lips, then crept back into the silent house.

A maid came and brought me a letter, and I sat down in the little conservatory to read it; but as I was about to break the seal, seeing the girl lingering, I asked her what she wanted.

She stammered something about a white rabbit that had been caught in the house, and asked what should be done with it. I told her to let it loose in the walled garden behind the house, and opened my letter.

It was from Jack, but so incoherent that I thought he must have lost his reason.

It was nothing but a series of prayers to me not to leave the house until he could get back; he could not tell me why; there were the dreams, he said—he could explain nothing, but he was sure I must not leave the house in the Rue Sainte-Cecile.

AS I finished reading I raised my eyes and saw the same maid-servant standing in the doorway holding a glass dish in which two goldfish were swimming.

"Put them back into the tank and tell me what you mean by interrupting me," I said.

With a half-suppressed whimper she emptied water and fish into an aquarium at the end of the conservatory, and, turning to me, asked my permission to leave my service. She said people were playing tricks on her, evidently with a design to getting her into trouble; the marble rabbit had been stolen and a live one had been brought into the house; the two beautiful marble fish were gone, and she had just found those common live things flopping about, there, on the dining-room floor.

I reassured her and sent her away, saying I would look about myself. I went into the studio; there was nothing there but my canvases and some casts, except the marble of the Easter lily.

I saw it on a table across the room. Then I strode angrily over to it. But the flower I lifted from the table was fresh and fragile, and filled the air with perfume.

Then suddenly I comprehended, and sprang through the hallway to the marble-room.

The doors flew open, then, the sunlight streamed into my face, and through it, in a heavenly glory, the "Madonna" smiled, as Genevieve lifted her flushed face from her marble couch and opened her sleepy eyes.

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(Continued from page 6)

met has mentioned it in relation to something or other. Publish a few of the more obscure fantasies—none of Stapledon's or Wright's.

Lots of Luck,

BILL WATSON

1299 CALIFORNIA ST.
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.

Editor's Note: "The Wind That Tramps the World" was published twice in a magazine. Paul is engaged in war work.

F.F.M BEST OF ITS KIND

I have not yet read the September issue of F.F.M. But the fact is that it is not necessary, to see that the number is great! After that long pause, I was surprised to meet up with my old friend again. But F.F.M.'s back!

Got the last copy on the 7TH newsstand visited—scarce stuff, already. Rare—really—at three-month intervals! Why? I see no excuse for not resuming monthly schedule. Contemporary editors are scraping the dish for the last few good writers that Uncle Sam hasn't adopted, while F.F.M. has all of the great fantasy authors of history on its docket! Besides, everyone knows that your publication is not only the best of its kind today—but ever!

Any chance of going *Railroad Magazine* style on us—trim, smooth, and handy? By the way, tread softly on that new policy. We don't want hack writers.

Looking over my hundred-odd file of a contemporary (although, certainly no rival, by any means!) I find that close to 1500 readers—over a ten-year stretch—preferred the writings of their favorites by the margins—:

300 points .....Jack Williamson
280 .....E. E. Smith, Ph.D.
135 .....A. E. Van Vogt
115 .....R. Z. Gallun
100 .....C. L. Moore
95 .....Murray Leinster

If F.F.M. wants new stories, then stick to these or their standards. Give us A. Merritt, John Hawkins, John Taine, C. A. Smith. But above all else, remember! There are dozens of great published classics to draw from first!

Keep Virgil Finlay on the covers—and the lead story every month! Bok is good if you watch him—and if he keeps away from loosely-drawn monsters. And no others, please—unless you can scare up Elliot Dold, Jr., the master of weird and S-F art! Or maybe Dolgov.

Incidentally, Finlay's work has dropped a good deal since he abandoned the dark-shadowed stipple-work of years ago. None of this sketchy, charcoal work, please. Currently Nanek's pen satisfies. A consistent full-page Finlay-drawn poem or prose-line would be great!

Sorry we have had to forget the magazine-masters for a while (for a few years, maybe?)—but I am sure you might be able to give us more of Lovecraft, for one, that is strictly "book-stuff." Keep Taine and Stapledon and Chambers at the head of the prospective reprint list. Especially "Purple Sapphire."

One more item, seconding Harry Harig, on the title: F.F.M. doesn't fit. Several times, I have found the magazine among the "mystery" publications on the newsstand—"Mystery Detective," "Murder Mystery," etc. Bad, bad. How about *"Classics of* FANTASY?"

I happened onto the Sept. issue while on my way to the Post Office. Intended a package—heavy one, too—for 205 E. 42nd St., N. Y. C. Changed my mind on that, though. However, tell Merritt that he'd better grind out that Chinese sorcery tale soon, or I'll reconsider—for another address. You bet!

Thanks for a good book,

WALTHER A. CARRITHERS

463 N. 2ND ST.,
FRESNO 2,
CALIFORNIA.

Editor's Note: We've reminded Merritt that the fans want a story. Finlay is in the Army.

MORE "KING IN YELLOW" WANTED

Just a few words with regard to the September F.F.M. and a couple of suggestions that you'll no doubt welcome with an enthusiasm amounting almost to complete boredom.

First, the current *Famous Fantastic Mysteries.* Six months is a long time to wait for any magazine, but Taine, Finlay, Moore and Chambers are an ample reward for those long, weary weeks spent scanning the stands for a magazine that wasn't there.

"The Iron Star" was an excellent yarn—and a very refreshing one, both in plot and the smooth, seemingly effortless writing. Taine put a lot of thought into the story, and it was one of the few that I've read that managed to bring in many scientific theories and discussions without making the story drag by so doing. Taine hardly did himself justice in that squib on "The Editor's Page." He holds more degrees than a thermometer. I suggest that you look up some info on him and put it in the next issue.

"The Yellow Sign" isn't far behind the lead novel in quality and interest. Let's see more from "The King in Yellow."

Miss Moore wove an interesting tale in "Doorway Into Time," though it isn't anything really exceptional. Quite acceptable, though.

As for the artwork, I won't comment on Finlay for you already know what everyone thinks of *him,* but the return of Bok was sheer ecstasy. More! That was a nice job for the Moore yarn, too—better than the rather silly thing Finlay did on the cover. Tut tut, Virgil—you can paint a more convincing monster than that overgrown worm.

The verse was nice, although I do not especially care for that type of poetry. Above my head, probably.

And now for a few suggestions. First, let's have some really good new novels by anyone who can write *good* novels—Ray Cummings, Ralph Milne Farley, Clark Ashton Smith, Edgar Rice Burroughs, etc. And let's keep pounding away at Merritt until he has to write in self-defense. Ah, for another "Moon Pool!"

(Continued on page 132)

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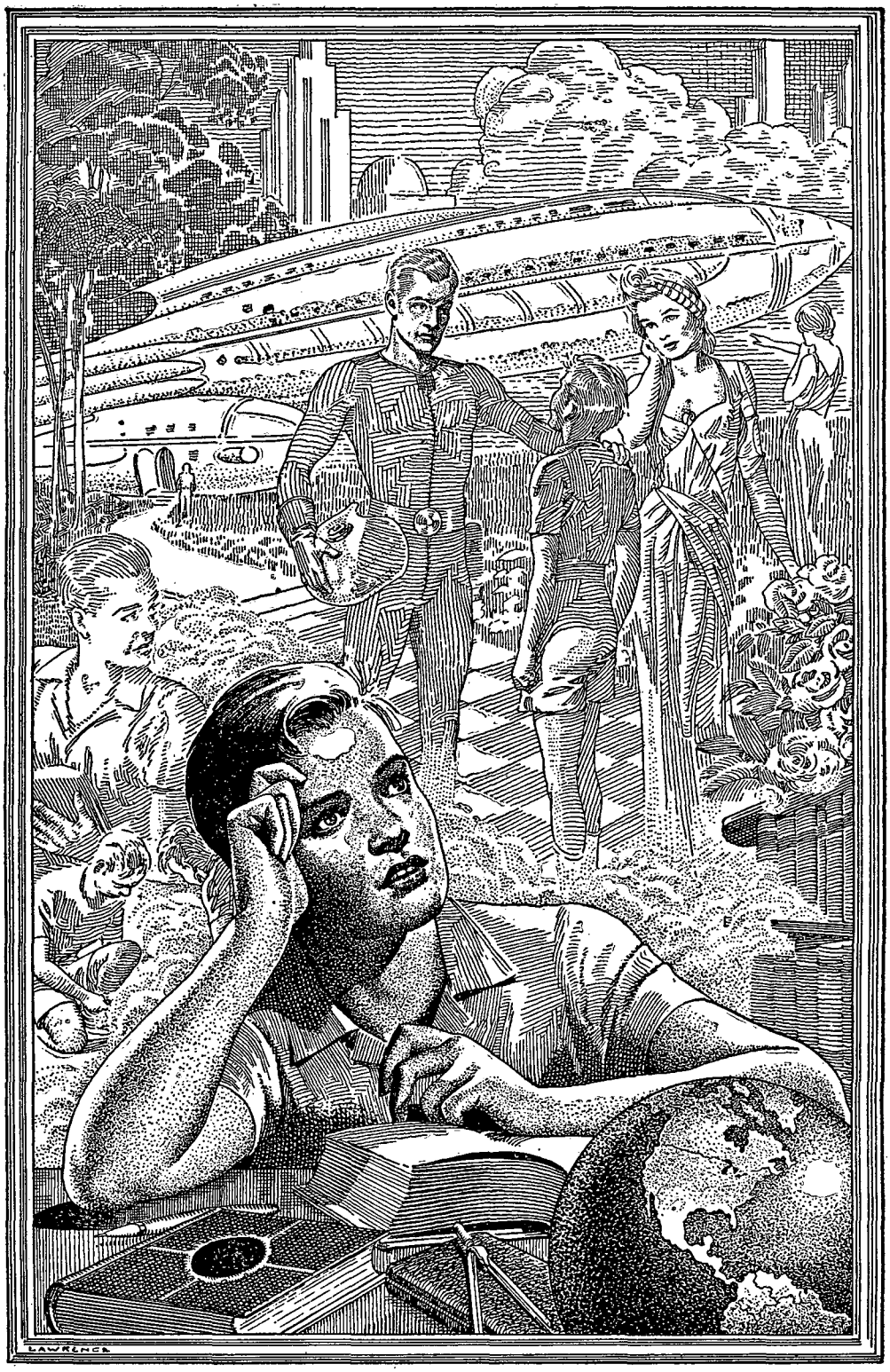

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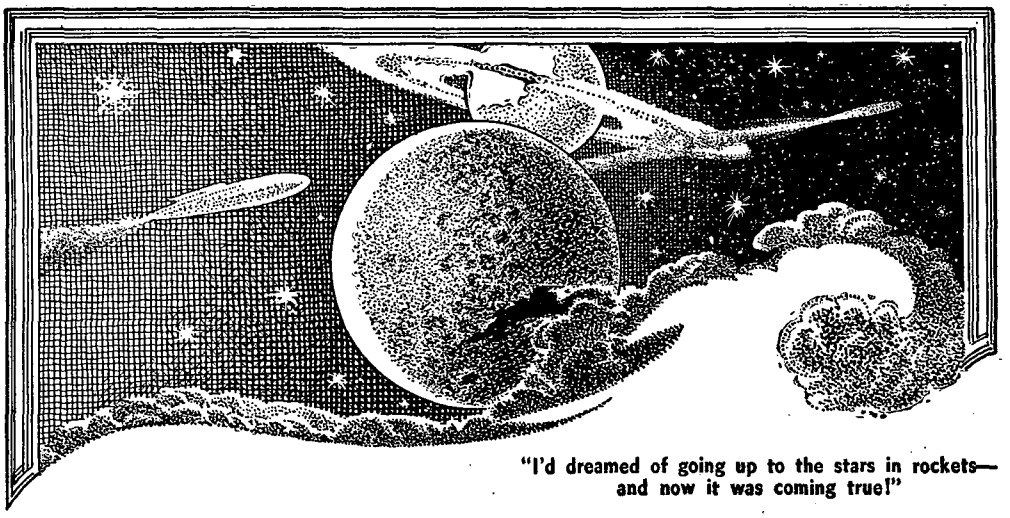

"I'd dreamed of going up to the stars in rockets—and now it was coming true!"

King of the Gray Spaces

By Ray Bradbury

Chosen . . . one out of a million . . . for only the best could be trusted with the lives of travelers in the space lanes between the planets. . . . This is the story of how one boy received the summons—and how he answered it.

WE WERE just a lot of kids. With cut fingers, lumpy heads and whining tenor voices. We liked our game of mibs as well as the next rumple-hair; but we liked the rockets more.

Every Saturday morning the guys met at my house and yelled until the neighbors were moved to brandishing paralysis guns out their ventilators and commanding the guys to shut their damned traps or they'd be frozen solid on the spot for an hour, and *then* where would they be?

Aw, gwan, climb a rocket and stick your head into the mainjet, the kids always replied, but doing so when safe behind our garden fence. Old Man Wickard, next door, is a ripe potter with the para-gun.

It was Saturday morning and I was lying in bed thinking about how I screwed my exam on semantics the day before at formula-school, and playing with the idea of Sally Gibberts, the television star, when I heard the gang yelling outside. It was hardly seven-thirty and there was a lot of fog still roaming around Los Angeles in from the Pacific; and only now were the weather control vibrators at every corner starting to shoot out their proton-rays to get

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rid of the stuff. I heard them moaning soft and nice.

I padded to the window and stuck my red-haired presence out. "Okay, you space-pirates," I said. "What's all the big jet-gush?"

"Come on!" retorted Ralph Priory. "We just found out there's a different schedule today. The Moon Rocket, the new one, with the new X-tube-jet, is cutting gravity!"

"Yow!" I replied and zippered my frame into a jumper, pulled on my boots, inserted my food-tabs in my mid-belt pouch and went down the three stories in the vac-elevator. All five of the guys were there, chewing their lips and worrying. We beat it double for the underground and made it, just as a cylinder hissed in for Rocket Port.

I had bugs in my stomach. This was only the fourth time in my life I had ever seen a really big ship pull gravity. A guy of fourteen doesn't get out to the Rocket Port often, usually just on Saturdays when the small continental cargo slides in and out on the norm.

"God, I'm excited!" said Priory, hitting me on the arm-muscle.

I punched him back. "Me, too. Saturday's my favorite day." Priory and I traded wide, understanding grins. We got along all X. The other pirates were okay, Sidney Rossen, Mac Leslyn, and Earl Marnee—they knew how to jump around like all the kids, and they loved the rockets, too, but I had the feeling that they wouldn't be doing what Ralph Priory and I would do some day. Ralph and I wanted the stars for each of us, more than we would want a fistful of blue-white, clear-cut diamonds.

WE GIBBERED the quick, laughing stuff that all kids gibber. And then the cylinder was whispering to a standstill and we were scrambling. Ralph Priory and I were on our long legs ahead of the others, telling them to hurry, the slow-pokes; and getting to the pyrionite observation rail just in time to see the big rocket poking its wonderful nose out the hangar-door.

I quit breathing. I didn't suck another breath until the ship was all out on the field, dragged there by chugging tractors, and followed by a lot of little bug-like mechanics in asbestos suits and fire-proof visors.

"The *very* Good Lord," amended Priory at my elbow.

The others chanted it together. "Good Lord, good Lord. . . ."

It was something to 'good Lord' about. It was a hundred years of dreaming all sorted out and chosen and put together to make the hardest, prettiest, swiftest dream of all. Every line was like perfect steel muscles sleeping there in the middle of the field, ready to wake up with a roar, jump up and hit its silver head against the Milky Way's ceiling, and make the stars fall down like frightened confetti. You felt it could do that, kick the Universe right in the belly and tell it to get out of the way.

It got me in the stomach, too—it got a steel grip there that made me sick with longing and envy. And when the pilots strolled onto the field, my feet walked with them in their shined gray boots, in their skin-tight, salt-colored uniforms. They looked and acted as if they were going to attend a magnetic ball game at one of the local mag-fields. But they were going to the Moon and they didn't seem worried at all.

"Gosh," I said. "What wouldn't I give to go with them. What wouldn't I give."

One of the other kids had his eyes open pop-wide. "I'd give my vac-tube privilege for the next ten years—to ride that."

"Yeah. Oh, very much,—yeah."

It was a big feeling for us kids. A big emotion for a lot of pee-wee con-

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tainers. But we'd learned the words at school and even if we couldn't assimilate every angle and possibility of the ships, we had our semantics down tight and we had our minds set. Each of us wanted to be a spacial engineer.

And then the preliminaries got over with. The fuel was in the rocket and the men ran away from it on the ground like ants running lickety from a metal god—and the Dream woke up and gave a yell and jumped into the sky. And then it was gone, all the vacuum shouting of it, leaving nothing but a trembling in the air and through the ground, and up our legs to our fourteen year old hearts. Where it had been was a blazed, seared pock and a fog of rocket smoke like a cumulus cloud banked low.

"It's gone," yelled Priory.

And we all began to breathe fast again, frozen there on the ground as if stunned by the passing of a gigantic paralysis gun.

"I want to grow up quick," I said, then. "I want to grow up quick so I can take that rocket."

I bit my lips. I was so darned young, and you cannot apply for space work. You have to be *chosen*. Chosen.

Finally somebody, I guess it was Sidney, said:

"Let's go to the tele-show now."

Everyone said yeah, except Priory and myself. We said no, and the other kids went off laughing breathlessly, talking, and left Priory and me there to look at the spot where the ship had been.

It spoiled everything else for us—that takeoff.

Because of it, I flunked my semantics test on Monday.

I didn't care.

AT times like that I thanked Providence for concentrates. When your stomach is nothing but a coiled mass of excitement, you hardly feel like drawing a chair to a full hot dinner. A few concen-tabs, swallowed, did wonderfully well as substitution, without the urge of appetite.

I got to thinking about it, tough and hard, all day long and late at night. It got so bad I had to use sleep-massage mechs every night, coupled with some of Tschaikowsky's softer melodious things, to get my eyes sealed.

"Good Lord, young man," said my teacher, that Monday at class. "If this keeps up I'll have you reclassified at the next psych-board meeting."

"I'm very sorry," I replied.

He looked hard at me. "What sort of blocking have you got? It must be a very simple one and also a conscious one."

I winced. "It's conscious, sir; but it's not simple. It's multi-tentacular. In brief, though—it's rockets."

He smiled a little bit at me and said, "*R* is for Rocket, eh?"

"I guess that's it, sir."

"We can't let it interfere with your scholastic record, though, young man."

"Do you think I need tele-impregnation, sir?"

"Oh, no. That's ridiculous. You're balanced." He picked up a small tab of records with my name blocked on them. He flipped through it. I had a funny stone in my stomach, just lying there. He looked up at me. "You know, Christopher, you're king-of-the-hill here; you're head of the class." He licked his lips wet and closed his eyes and mused over it.

"We'll have to see about a lot of other things," he concluded. Then he patted me on the shoulder.

"Well—get on with your work. Nothing to worry about."

He walked away.

I tried to get back to work, but I couldn't. During the rest of the day the teacher kept looking at me and look-

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ing at my tab-record and chewing his lip. About two in the afternoon he dialed a number on his desk-audio and discussed something with somebody for about fifteen minutes.

I couldn't hear what was said.

But when he set the audio into its cradle, he stared straight at me with the funniest light in his eyes.

It was envy and admiration and pity all in one. It was a little sad and it was much of happiness. It had a lot in it, just in his eyes. The rest of his face said nothing.

It made me feel like a saint and a devil sitting there.

RALPH PRIORY and I slid home from formula-school together early that afternoon. I told Ralph what had happened and he frowned in the dark way he always frowns, using his dark eyes and his night-colored brows and his curly mop of black skull-hair.

I began to worry. And between the two of us we doubled and tripled the worry over again.

"You don't think you'll sent away do you, Chris?"

Our cylinder gushed her fore-jets and we stopped at our station. We got out. We walked, slow. "I don't know," I said.

"That would be plain dirty," said Ralph.

"Maybe I need a good mental going over, though, Ralph. I can't go on flubbing my studies this way."

We stopped outside my house and looked at the sky for a long moment. Ralph said something funny:

"The stars aren't out in the daytime, but we can see 'em, can't we, Chris?"

"Yeah," I said. "Damn right we can."

'We'll stick it together, huh, Chris? Damn them, they can't take you away now. We're pals. It wouldn't be fair."

I didn't say anything, because there was no room in my throat for anything but a hectagonal lump.

"What's the matter with your eyes," asked Priory.

"Ah, I looked at the sun too long. Come on inside, Ralph."

We yelled under the shower spray in the bath-cubicle, but our yells weren't especially convincing, even when we turned on the ice-water.

While we were standing in the warm-air dryer, I did a lot of thinking. Literature, I figured, was full of people who fought battles against hard, razor-edged opponents. They pitted brain and muscle against obstacles until they won out or were themselves defeated. But here was I with hardly a sign of any outward conflict. It was all running around in spiked boots inside my head, making cuts and bruises where no one could see them except me and a psycho. But it was just as bad.

I looked at Ralph Priory as we zippered on our *jhams,* and I said, "I got a war on, Ralph."

"All by yourself?" he asked.

"I can't include you," I said. "Because this is personal. How many times has my mother said, 'Don't eat so much, Chris, your eyes are bigger than your stomach.' "

"A million times."

"*Two* million. Well, paraphrase it, Ralph. Change it to 'Don't *see* so much, Chris, your mind is too big for your body.' I got a war on between a mind that wants things my body can't give it."

Priory nodded quietly. "I see what you mean about it's being a personal war. In that case, Christopher, I'm at war, too."

"I knew you were," I said. "Somehow I think the other kids'll grow out of it. But I don't think we will, Ralph. I think we'll keep waiting."

We sat down in the middle of the sunlit upper deck of the house, and

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started checking over some homework on our formula-pads. Priory couldn't get his. Neither could I. Priory put into words the very thing I didn't dare say out loud:

"Chris, the Interplanet Patrol *selects*. You can't apply for it. You *wait*."

"I know."

"You wait from the time you're old enough to turn cold in the stomach when you see a Moon rocket, until all the years go by, and every month that passes you hope that one morning a blue Patrol glider will come down out of the sky, landing on your lawn, and that a neat looking engineer will ease out, walk up the rampway briskly, and touch the bell.

"You keep waiting for that Patrol glider until you're twenty-one. And then, on the last day of your twentieth year you get good and drunk and laugh a lot and say what the hell you didn't really care about it anyway."

We both just sat there, deep in the middle of his words. We both just sat there. Then;

"I don't want that disappointment, Chris. I'm fourteen, just like you. But if I reach my twenty-first year without anyone of the Patrol touching the bell where I live at the ortho-station, I—"

"I know," I said. "I know. I've talked to men who've waited and dreamed and prayed. And if it happens that way, Ralph, well—we'll get good and drunk together and then go out and take jobs loading cargo on a Europe-bound freighter."

Ralph stiffened and his face went pale. "Loading cargo."

There was a soft, quick step on the ramp and my mother was there. I smiled. "Hi, lady!"

"Hello. Hello, Ralph."

"Hello, Jhene."

She didn't look much older than twenty-five, for having cradled me and raised me and worked at the Government Statistics House. She was light and graceful and smiled a lot, and I could see how father must have loved her much when he was alive. One parent is better than none. Poor Priory, now, raised in one of those orthopedical stations. . . .

Jhene walked over and put her hand on Ralph's face. "You look ill," she said. "What's wrong?"

Ralph managed a fairly good smile. "Nothing—at all."

Jhene didn't need prompting. She said, "You can stay here tonight, Priory. We want you. Don't we, Chris?"

"Heck, yes."

"I should get back to the ortho-station," said Ralph, rather feebly, I observed. "But since you asked and Chris here needs help on his semantics for tomorrow, I'll stick and help him.

"Very generous," I said.

"First, though, I have a few errands. I'll take the tube and be back in half an hour, people."

"All right."

When Ralph was gone my mother looked at me intently and came and sat down on the cushioned roof next to me. She brushed my red hair back with a nice little move of her fingers.

Then she said, "Something's happening, Chris."

My heart stopped talking because it didn't want to talk any more for awhile. It waited.

I opened my mouth, but Jhene went on:

"Something's up somewhere. I had two audio calls at work today. One from your teacher. One from—I can't say. I don't know. I don't want to say until things happen—"

My heart started talking again, slow and hot.

"Don't tell me, then, Jhene. Those calls—"

She just looked at me. She took my hand between her two soft warm ones.

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"You're so young, Chris. You're so awfully young."

I didn't speak.

Her eyes brightened. "You never knew your father. I wish you had. You know what he was, Chris?"

I said. "Yeah. He worked in a Chemistry Lab, deep underground most of the time."

And, my mother added, strangely, "He worked deep under the ground, Chris, and never saw the stars."

My heart yelled in my chest. Yelled loud and hard.

"Oh, mother. Mother—"

It was the first time in years I had called her mother.

WHEN I woke the next morning there was a lot of sunlight in the room, but the cushion where Priory slept when he stayed over, was vacant. I listened. I didn't hear him splashing in the shower-cube, and the dryer wasn't humming. He was gone.

I found his note pinned on the sliding door.

> See you at formula at noon. Your mother wanted me to do some work for her. She got a call this morning, and said she needed me to help. So long. Priory.

Priory out running errands for Jhene. Strange. A call in the early morning to Jhene. I went back and sat down on the cushion.

While I was sitting there a bunch of the kids yelled down on the lawn-court. "Hey! Hey, Chris! You're late!"

I stuck my head out the window. "Be right down, fellas!"

"No, Chris."

My mother's voice. It was quiet and it had something funny in it. I turned around. She was standing in the doorway behind me, her face pale, drawn, full of some small pain. "No, Chris," she said again, softly. "Tell them to go on to formula without you—today."

The kids were still making noise downstairs, I guess, but I didn't hear them. I just felt myself and my mother, slim and pale and restrained in my room. Far off, the weather control vibrators started to hum and throb.

I turned slowly and looked down at the kids. The three of them were looking up, lips parted casually, half-smiling, semantic-tabs in their knotty fingers. "Hey—" one of them said. Sidney, it was.

"Sorry, Sid. Sorry, gang. Go on without me. I can't go to formula today. See you later, huh?"

"Aw, Chris!"

"What's wrong, Chris?"

"Sick?"

"No. Just—just go on without me, gang. I'll see you."

I felt numb. I turned away from their upturned, questioning faces and glanced at the door. Mother wasn't there. She had gone downstairs, quietly. I heard the kids moving off, not quite as boisterously, toward the cylinder station.

Walking to the vac-elevator, I went down to the second floor. "Jhene," I said, "where's Ralph?"

Jhene pretended to be interested in combing her long yellow hair with a vibro-toothed comb. "I sent him off. I didn't want him here this morning."

"Why am I staying home from formula, Jhene?"

"Chris, please don't ask. Please don't."

Before I could say anything else, there was a sound in the air. It cut through the very sound-proofed wall of the house, and hummed in my marrow, quick and high as an arrow of glittering music.

I swallowed. All the fear and uncertainty and doubt went away, instantly.

When I heard that note, I thought

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of Ralph Priory. *Oh, Ralph, if you could be here now.* I couldn't believe the truth of it. Hearing that note and hearing it with my whole body and soul as well as with my ears.

It came closer, that sound. I was afraid it would go away. But it didn't go away. It lowered its pitch and came down outside the house, and I knew it was a Patrol car, the color of the sky. It stopped humming and in the silence my mother tensed forward, dropped the vibro-comb and took in her breath.

In that silence, too, I heard booted footsteps walking up the ramp below. Footsteps that I had waited for a long time.

Footsteps I had been afraid would never come.

Somebody touched the bell.

And I *knew* who it was.

And all I could think was, "Ralph, why in hell did you have to go away now, when all this is happening? Damn it, Ralph, why did you?"

He looked as if he had been born in his uniform. It fitted like a second layer of salt-colored skin, touched here and there with a line, a dot of blue. As simple and perfect a uniform as could be made, but with all the muscled power of the cosmos behind it.

His name was Trent. He spoke firmly, with a natural round perfection, directly to the subject.

I stood there, and my mother was on the far side of the room looking like a bewildered little girl. I stood there, listening.

Out of all the talking I remember some of the snatches:

". . . highest grades, highest I. Q. Perception keen, curiosity sharp. Enthusiasm necessary to the long, ten-year educational grind."

"Yes, sir."

". . . talks with your semantics and phychology teacher—"

"Yes, sir. . . ."

". . . and don't forget, Mr. Christopher. . . ."

Mister. Mister Christopher!

". . . and don't forget, Mr. Christopher, nobody is to know you have been selected by the Patrol."

"No one, sir?"

"Your mother and teacher know, naturally. But no other person must know. Is that perfectly understood?"

"Yes, sir."

Trent smiled quietly, standing there with his big hands at his sides. "You want to ask why, don't you? Why you can't tell it to your friends, but you're afraid to ask. I'll explain—

"It's a form of psychological protection. We select about two thousand young men each year from the earth's billions. Out of that number seventeen hundred wind up, ten years later, as solar engineers. The others must return to society. They've flunked out, but there's no reason for everyone to know. They usually flunk out if they're going to flunk, in the first year. And it's tough to go back and face your friends and say you couldn't make the grade in the biggest job of the universe. So we make it easy to go back.

"Yes, and there's still another reason. *It* is phychological, too. Half the fun of being a kid is being able to lord it over the other guys, by being superior in some way. We take half the fun out of being selected for the Patrol, by strictly forbidding you to tell your pals. Then, we'll know if you wanted to go into the Patrol for purely egoistic, glory reasons, or for the Patrol itself, and its work. If you're in it for personal conceit—you're damned. If you're in it because you can't help being in it and *have* to be in it—you're blessed."

He addressed my mother. "Thank you, Mrs. Christopher."

I said, "Sir. A question, please."

"Yes?"

"I have a friend, named Ralph Pri-

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ory. He's from an ortho-station and—"

Trent nodded. "I can't tell you if he's on our lists, or not, Christopher. He's your buddy, isn't he? And you want him along? I can't tell you. I'll look into his record. Station-bred is he? That's not so good. But—we'll check him."

"If you would—please. Thank you."

"Saturday afternoon, then, at five, Mr. Christopher. No talk. Report at the Rocket Port, to me."

He saluted me and I watched him turn and walk off and I heard the Patrol car go up in the sky, singing away.

Mother was beside me, very quickly, holding me. "Chris. Oh, Chris."

We held on to each other.

I felt her whisper in my ear, warm, fast.

"It's almost like being taken by a church, isn't it?" she said. "Like in the old days two hundred years ago when they took the ecclesiastic vows and the veils. You'll be part of a—a cosmic brotherhood, Chris. You won't be mine any more, you'll belong to all the worlds.

"I can't believe it's true."

"It is. It is true, and you'll be all the things your father wanted to be and never got to be."

"Damned right, I will. Oh, damned right—"

I caught my voice. "Jhene—how—how will we tell it to Priory? What about him?"

Mother knew what to do all the time. She was always far ahead of my thoughts, and she said, quietly, "You're going away, that's all, Chris. Tell him that. Tell him you need psyco-reorganization. He'll understand."

"But, Jhene, you—"

She smiled, softly. "Yes, I'll be lonely, Chris. Very lonely. But I'll have my work and I'll have Priory."

"You mean. . . .

"I'm taking him from the ortho-station. He'll live here, when you are gone. That's what you *wanted* me to say, wasn't it, Chris?"

I nodded, all paralyzed and strange inside.

"That's exactly what I wanted you to say."

"He'll be a good son, Chris. Almost as good as you, but not quite."

"He'll be *fine!*"

WE told Ralph Priory. How I was going away and how mother wanted him to come live as her son, now, until such time as I came back. We said it quick and fast, as if it burned our tongues. We wanted to get it over with. And when we finished, Ralph came and shook my hand and kissed my mother on the cheek and he said:

"I'll be proud. I'll be very proud."

It was funny, but Ralph didn't even ask me why I was going. Or where I was going, or how long I would be away. All he would say was, "We had a lot of fun, didn't we?" and let it go at that, as if he didn't dare say any more, because it hurt.

It was Friday night, after a concert at the amphitheater in the center of our public circle, and Priory and Jhene and I came home, laughing, ready to go to bed.

I hadn't packed anything. Priory noted this briefly, and let it go. All of my personal supplies for the next ten years would be supplied by someone else. No need for packing.

My semantics teacher called on the audio, smiling and saying a very brief, pleasant good-by.

Then, we went to bed. Priory and I up in my room, and I kept thinking in the hour before I lolled off, about how this was the last night with Jhene and Priory. The very last night. And it hurt.

Only a kid of fourteen—me.

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And then, in the darkness, just before I went to sleep, Priory twisted softly on his cushion, turned his solemn face to me in a whisper. "Chris?" A pause. "Chris. You still awake?" It was like a faint echo.

"Yes," I said.

"Thinking?"

A pause.

"Yes."

He said. "You're—you're not *waiting* any more are you, Chris?"

I knew what he meant. I couldn't answer.

I said, "I'm awfully tired, Ralph."

He twisted back and settled down, and said, "That's what I thought. You're not *waiting* any more. Gosh, but that's good, Chris. That's good."

He reached out and punched me in the arm-muscle, lightly.

Then we both went to sleep.

IT was Saturday morning. The kids were yelling outside. Their voices filled the seven o'clock fog. I heard Old Man Wicard's ventilator flip open and the zip of his para-gun, playfully touching around the kids.

"Shut up!" I heard him cry, but he didn't sound grouchy. It was a regular Saturday game with him. And I heard the kids giggle.

Priory woke up and said, "Shall I tell them, Chris, you're not going with them today?"

"Tell them nothing of the sort." Jhene, dressed in a pretty pair of blue *jhams,* moved from the door. She bent out the window, her hair soft yellow against a ribbon of fog. "Hi, gang! Priory and Chris will be right down. Hold gravity!"

"Jhene!" I complained.

She came over to both of us. "You're going to spend your Saturday the way you always spend it—with the gang!"

"I planned on sticking with you, Jhene."

"What sort of holiday would *that* be, now?"

She ran us through our showers, food and rub-downs quick off. She kissed us both on the cheek, spanked us playfully, and forced us out the door into the gang's arms. Sidney and Leslyn and Earl.

"Let's not go out to the Rocket Port today, guys."

"Aw, Chris—why not?"

Their faces did a lot of changes. This was the first time in history I hadn't wanted to go. "You're kidding, Chris."

"Sure he is!"

"No, he's not. He means it," said Priory. "And *I* don't want to go either. We go *every* Saturday. It gets tiresome. We can go next week instead."

"Aw. . . ."

They didn't like it, but they didn't go off by themselves. It was no fun, they said, without Priory and Christopher.

"What the hell—we'll go next week."

"Sure we will. What do you want to do, Chris?"

I told them.

We spent the morning playing mibs and running around in an old abandoned vac-tube. Later we took an air-car to the forest outside Los Angeles and ran laughing through the ruins of ancient Glendale. And I remember thinking through it all—this is the last day. Playing mibs, running in the woods, going to the amphitheater kid matinees.

We did everything we had ever done before on Saturdays. All the silly crazy things, and nobody knew I was going away except Priory.

Five o'clock kept getting nearer and nearer.

At four, I said good-by to the kids.

"Leaving so soon, Chris? What about tonight?"

"Call for me at eight," I said. "We'll go see the new Sally Gibberts tele-film."

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"Swell."

"Cut gravity!"

And Priority and I went home in the tube.

Mother wasn't there, but she had left part of herself, her smile and her voice and her words on a spool of audio-film on my bed. I inserted it in the viewer and threw the picture on the wall. Soft yellow hair, her white face and her soft words:

"I hate good-byes, Chris. I've gone to the laboratory to do some extra work. Good luck. All of my love. When I see you again—you'll be a man."

That was all.

Priory waited outside while I saw it over four times. "I hate good-byes, Chris. I've gone—"

I had had a film-spool made myself the night before. I spotted it in the viewer and left it there. It only said good-by.

Priory walked halfway with me. I wouldn't let him get in the Rocket Port vac-cylinder with me. I just shook his hand, tight, and said, "It was fun today, Ralph."

"Yeah. Well, see you next Saturday, huh, Chris?"

"I wish I could say yes."

"Say yes anyway. Next Saturday—the woods, the cylinder, the port, and Old Man Wickard and his trusty paragun."

We laughed. "Sure. Next Saturday, early. Take—take care of *our* mother, will you, Priory?"

"That's a silly question, you nut," he said.

"It is, isn't it?"

He swallowed. "Chris."

"Yeah?"

"I'll be waiting. Just like you waited and don't have to wait any more. *I'll* wait."

"Maybe it won't be long, Priory. I hope not."

I jabbed him, once, in the arm-muscle. He jabbed back.

The cylinder door sealed. The cylinder hurled itself down the tube, and Priory was left behind.

I stepped out of the tube at the port. It was a five hundred yard walk down to the Administration building. It took me ten years to walk it.

"Next time I see you you'll be a man—"

"Don't tell anybody—"

"I'll wait, Chris—"

It was all choked in my heart and it wouldn't go away, and it swam around in my eyes and it pulled my lips down, hard.

I'm not a kid any more, I said to myself.

I thought about my dreams. The Moon Rocket. It won't be part of me, part of my *dream* any longer. *I'll* be part of *it.*

I felt small there, walking, walking, walking.

THE afternoon rocket to Venus was just taking off as I went down the ramp to the office. It shivered the ground and it shivered and thrilled my heart.

I was beginning to grow up awfully fast.

I stood watching it, until some one snapped their heels, cracked me a quick salute.

I was numb.

"C. M. Christopher?"

"Yes, sir. Reporting, sir."

"This way, Christopher."

Mother. Priory. I'll see you again, some day.

Mother!

Priory!

We were just a lot of kids. With cut fingers, lumpy heads and whining tenor voices. We liked our game of mibs as well as the next rumple hair. . . .

But we liked the rockets more.

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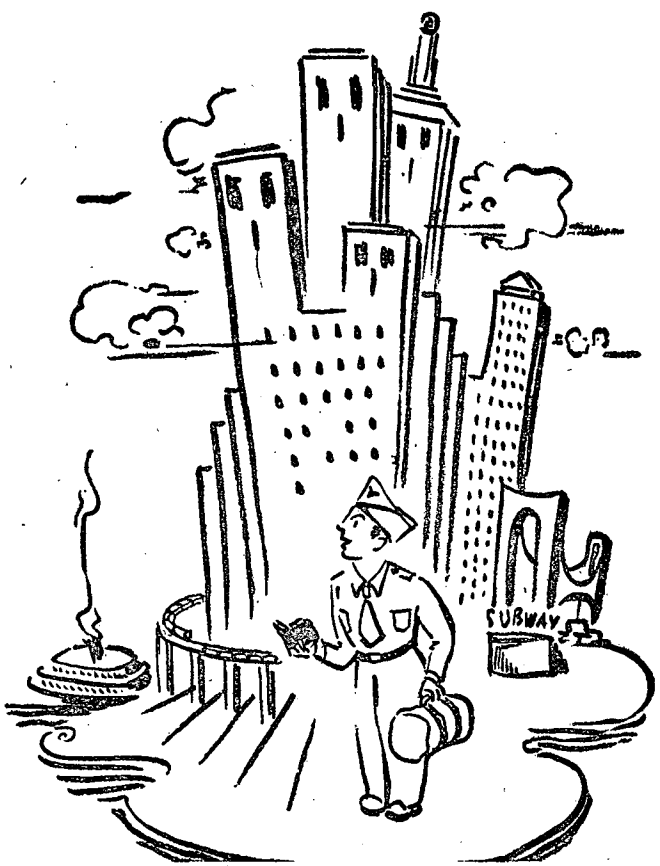

L O S T

Where'll I eat? Where'll I sleep? Where's my girl?

Last week on KP I kept thinking, "When I get to New York on my furlough, that'll be the day!"

So here I am, only I don't know my way around any more'n the Man From Mars. Can't even find my girl in this whale of a big and busy station.

Tell me, will you, what's a guy to do?

Listen, soldier, sailor, marine! We'll find a room for you, a good place to eat.

We'll even help you find your girl, who's probably hovering around the station this minute, looking for you.

That's what the Travelers Aid is here for — at the booth with the kindly light — to welcome you and to help you out!

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TRAVELERS AID

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(Continued from page 119)

Secondly, if you do not go monthly by the next issue I shall personally perform dark, occult voodoo on a devil-doll named Mary Gnaedinger. Sneer.

Further, let's enlarge the letter column and really get a large, interesting forum going.

Lastly, get Paul back again, for both cover and interior work.

With all best wishes for the success of the new F.F.M., as well as the monthly one that had better come, I remain,

CHAD OLIVER

3956 LEDGEWOOD,
CINCINNATI, OHIO.

VIRGIL FINLAY GRAND

I have been a newsstand reader of F.F.M. for several years, but only today did there occur just that combination of opportunity and inclination which would permit me to express my high opinion of your swell mag. The stimulus for this outburst was provided by Taine's swell novel "The Iron Star," which is strictly good stuff.

In the same issue, "The Yellow Sign" by Chambers also rings the bell: it is a horror story in the best traditions of Lovecraft himself. I cannot begin to praise sufficiently the grand illustrations of Virgil Finlay, and, to back up what I say, here is my order for his new portfolio of drawings and for my subscription to F.F.M.

Although I think your magazine is tops, I do have a few suggestions for improvements. How about giving us some of the stories from *Argosy* of a few years ago, or from old *All Story Magazine*? You are in a position to do a great deal of good for fantasy readers by giving us reprints of the out-of-print classics in the fantasy fiction field. Recently, I have been haunting every book shop I could find looking for such books as "The Snake Mother" and "Dwellers in the Mirage" by Merritt, and books by Taine, Hall, etc. I have found a few, but my most common result in such excursions was hurty feet and a large hole in the budget caused by the fabulous prices charged for these books.

Come on, now. How about some more Fantastic Novels?

Fantastically yours,

JOSEPH A. BLUNDON

94 MAIN ST.,
KEYSER, W. VA.

Editor's Note: We are not publishing stories which ever appeared in any other magazine, but we do not believe that this affects the quality of F.F.M.'s fantasy.

C. L. MOORE FAN

I've held off sending the new issue of *The Acolyte*, because I wanted to wait until I'd read the new F.F.M. My fanzine is going out under separate cover today.

I've not written yet on either of the Popular F.F.M.'s nor indeed on *Astounding Super Science*.

The March F.F.M. was a disappointment. In spite of the fulsome praise lavished on "The Ark of Fire," this novel, to put it mildly, gagged me. All it was (to my mind, at least) was a very conventional and not-too-well written pulp adventure story. It was merely my sense of duty to my old standby, F.F.M., that made me force myself to complete this, by far the poorest item you've ever published. And to make the issue all the worse, I also disliked "Into the Infinite" (and here I'd been saving the three previous installments unread for all these months so I could read it all as an especial treat!) All in all, your March issue was the poorest in F.F.M.'s history.

But September—ah, this is quite a different story. In the first place, "Doorway Into Time" is at least the equal of, if not indeed superior to, Miss Moore's famous "Shambleau." This is truly magnificent writing, worthy even of Lovecraft. From the magnificent opening section to the final denouement, Miss Moore built a breathtaking and genuine alien and *outre* bit of fantasy, and she is particularly to be commended for her restraint. Everything was half-shown and hinted at just enough to make this one of the finest fantasies I've ever had the pleasure of reading. If humanly possible, please try to make Miss Moore a F.F.M. regular; this reader would shout hosannahs right and left if you did.

Chambers' magnificent "Yellow Sign" is an old favorite of mine, and I hope this pleases the rest of the readers half as much as it does me. I particularly liked the illustrations for this one (by Knight?)—they alone were worth the price of the issue to me. I would like to see more of Nanek's verses in F.F.M.

"The Iron Star" was somewhat of a disappointment. I've heard of this item for years, and thought from the way everyone raved about it that it would be much better than it turned out to be. The "science" part of it, the mysterious and degenerating new meteoric element, and the degenerate half-man half-ape beings were all fine; but Taine's incessant moralizing and philosophising grated on me exceedingly. In fact, I'll go so far as to say his writing approaches amateurishness, though I will give him credit for magnificent ideas. I'd call the story an example of a magnificent idea badly marred by infantile development. In any case, I enjoyed it; which is more than I can say for "Ark of Fire."

I hope you don't feel that I merely wanted to sling a bunch of brickbats—F.F.M. is still A-1—but I'm of the opinion that considered criticism is probably of more value to you than unreasoning praise. Ergo, when you use something I feel could be better, I protest. All in all, the September issue is one of the very best you've ever had—and I don't care *what else* is in the magazine as long as you can present two stories of as high quality as "The Yellow Sign" and "Doorway Into Time."

The forthcoming "Three Go Back" intrigues me. Any time you stick out your neck so far as to compare a future offering with Merritt, you really must have a treat in store; I await this one eagerly.

(Continued on page 134)

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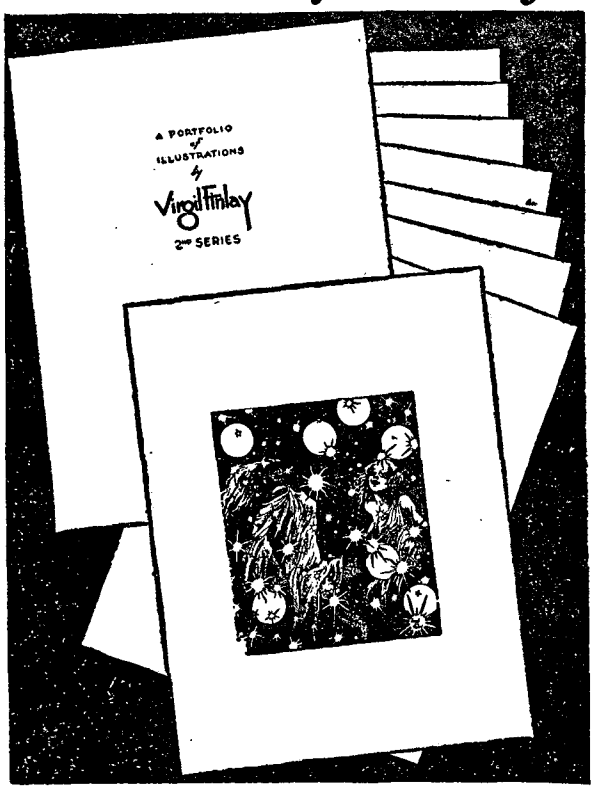
There Are Still Some "Finlay Portfolios" #2 Left!



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(Continued from page 132)

Long life to F.F.M.

FRANCIS T. LANEY

720 TENTH ST.,
CLARKSTOWN, WASH.

Editor's Note: The illustration for "The Yellow Sign" was by Bok.

REQUESTS

I guess that this is it. I can't restrain myself any longer. I have been a faithful follower of F.F.M. ever since I purchased the first edition. I liked it and that is why I have continued to purchase it on the newsstand as each issue was released. I suppose I nearly worried the dealers to death asking for it in advance. Then after the local dealers quit handling it I sent you my subscription. Well, that about takes care of my history in regard to F.F.M. with the exception of saying I have every issue.

Now. I was boiling mad when you said you were not going to publish any more of the Famous Fantastic Munsey's. What the heck, (I says). That's why I like the mag. What're you doin' to me? Well, I wrote two or three insultin' letters before I cooled down. Anyhow, I tore 'em and settled down to waiting. I better see what happens and then I'll let them know how I feel. Say, you could have bought my morale for two cents and a brass collar button when I got your card announcing the temporary discontinuance of my old pal, F.F.M. I went around with my chin on my shoelace for several days. I thought at first I wouldn't even send in the substitution card. Then I started composing nasty letters again. Again I tore 'em up. What's the use? F.F.M. is gone and I only have my memories. (And of course all the issues.)

Well, my blood pressure went up so high it coulda blowed up a quack's barometer, when I got your card anncing. that F.F.M. would be published after all. After several days' walking on clouds I got mad again. About not publishing any more Famous Munsey's. So now we are down to the point of this dispatch.

The issues since your taking over have been OK. I liked 'em. The stories were good *but*—Why not relax your no mag. reprint theory just a bit? Say, give us one Munsey reprint per issue. Else how am I ever gonna complete my collection of Merritt, etc.? *And, pleeeze,* don't degenerate into a SF Mag. The darn market is flooded with 'em. Personally I never read 'em. Let us stick close to the Fantasy idea. If you really want the readers' views, I hope you will listen to the few suggestions above and act accordingly.

One other thing. I read the "Readers Viewpoint" with interest each issue. I even read it before the stories cause I want to know how the Gallup Polls are coming along regarding F.F.M. In only a few instances have I noticed requests for a change in F.F.M. And each time they seem to be from young SF squirts that have probably purchased one issue at some second-hand mag. exchange and probably never will read another. Don't listen to them. Keep F.F.M. as it is. Tell Nanek I liked her poem. Also I agree that quarterly is not often enough. Should be at least every other month. Also tell G. H. Laird he expresses my sentiments exactly. (Note Ed.: read it again. It has lots of good suggestions).

Now we are nearing the end. I probably will withdraw into my shell for the next three or four years. But remember, I'm a-readin' it all, from cover to cover. When you do right, I'm a-cheerin'. When you do wrong, I'm a-cussin' ya. If this should happen to get into the R. V. Dept., I'd be glad to hear from some of youse guys and gals.

ED. NEWMAN

1216 LIVINGSTON RD., GR. CT.,
ROANOKE, VA.

WASSO SAYS:

In commenting on the letter of John A. Savage in the September issue of F.F.M. I would like to say that I hope that movies don't go in for science-fiction in a big way until some science-fiction fans and editors, with some brains and common sense manage somehow, to acquire influential positions in the motion picture industry. Otherwise, large-scale production of science-fiction and fantasy on the screen would be a calamity.

I also think a big mistake is being made in slanting science-fiction serials and radio programs at children, instead of adults. This is the reason that *our* literature is looked down upon as "kid stuff"; beneath the serious consideration of intelligent adults. The avalanche of science-fiction (?) comic booklets on the newsstands has also played havoc with *our* literature.

Sciencerely,

J. WASSO JR.

119 JACKSON AVE.,
PEN ARGYL, PA.

FROM "RAYM" HIMSELF

"The Ark of Fire", as I have reiterated many times before, is one of the great novels of science fiction. I was very happy to see it appear in F.F.M., for it represented a sort of personal triumph for me, a reward for my continued efforts to get the novel before the eyes of fandom and the large numbers of readers. Really, I'm proud to have been instrumental in giving the readers this treat.

The "Ark of Fire Bug" is not yet through singing the praises of this epic. The sheer sweeping force of it beggars description. Hawkins has painted a dynamic scientific civilization of the future with all his matchless power. The opening chapters are swift, vivid, realistic; America in the year 1980 is portrayed excellently. The same hard realism runs throughout the length of the yarn. The colorful, hard-hitting kaleidoscope of the world dying in the heat and the tidal waves is something no scientifictional writer has yet approached. Surely, "The Ark of Fire" must take its place among the three greatest scientifictional novels.

(Continued on page 136)

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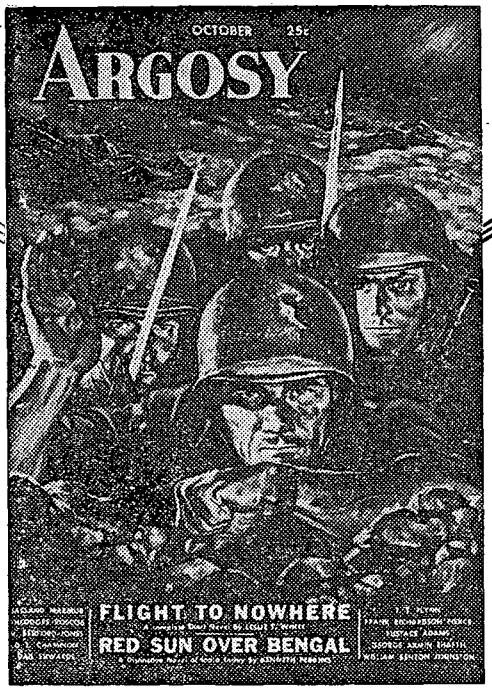
BIG NEW



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by D. L. CHAMPION

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by JACLAND MARMUR

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by JOE ARCHIBALD

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by GEORGE ARMIN SHAFTEL

Reflex Action
by WILLIAM B. JOHNSTON

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(Continued from page 134)

For the benefit of other readers who want more of Hawkins, he and his brother Ward contribute regularly to national magazines like the *Saturday Evening Post,* and they have appeared in *Argosy.* They also work on radio scripts and whatnot. They're right up there at the top, and deserve their place. I happen to know that they are constantly busy, and do not plan on writing any more science fiction for an indefinite period, so "The Ark of Fire" is a gem indeed. We all owe the editors a debt of thanks for obtaining it for us.

However, there were a few changes made. In the 1938 version, some of the first part was cut out as unnecessary—namely, the details of some of Steve's, Jay's, and Penny's night life before they parted. Later on in the story, when Hill was prowling around the ruins of New York searching for a gun, and found one, it was an Army automatic. So far, so good—but in the story, it was issued in 1940, *not* 1944.

In chapter one, in reference to the news stories Beck had covered, Hawkins' originally published story referred to the destruction of London by a great *Russian* bombing fleet, *not* Oriental. (I understand, of course, why this change was made, but I dislike very much making small changes in a great novel to "bring it up to date.") Oh, yes; when the final showdown came, and Hill & Co. were in De Spain's office (chapter XXIV), De Spain urged Hill to sit down, and O'Day growled, "Get on with it." In the first version, De Spain had to insist, very menacingly, that Hill sit down, and then De Spain went on to say that the guards had orders to shoot, etc. *Then* friend Brian said, "Get on with it." The last three paragraphs were omitted in the first version. There were other small changes, which I haven't space to list. Several of them annoyed me . . . such as the blurb line: "Could two brave young men . . ." O'Day, my dear editor, was not young.

Pardon me for being pedantic. The value of the story was not reduced appreciably, and I will gainsay none of the adjectives I have shouted concerning it.

The conclusion to "Into the Infinite" was very good, and it presents a nice contrast in literary style to Hawkins. The leisurely, detailed narrative type which went out with the twenties can be handled masterfully by a great writer like Austin Hall. There is a powerful, stirring emotional appeal in the lines—

"We are such stuff
As dreams are made on,
And our little life
Is rounded with a sleep."

I have the September issue on hand, unread. Could any fan supply me with the June issue?

RAYMOND WASHINGTON, JR.
LIVE OAK, FLORIDA

Editor's Note: Mr. Washington started the campaign for the publishing of "Ark of Fire."

MORE OF MOORE

After reading the September issue of F.F.M. I feel that I must break a lengthy silence and offer some comment on the new policy of the magazine.

I hesitate to comment on the feature story due to the fact that I feel sure my opinion would be censured. *I did not like* "The Iron Star." There, I said it. "The Iron Star" was simply one of those things that do not belong 'tween the covers of F.F.M.

The Finlay drawings were wonderful in the sense that they were typically Finlay. The cover was really a work of artistry.

Nanek's little piece was very well done as is all of her efforts.

More verse, please.

"The Yellow Sign" didn't quite hit the spot. If this is a sample of "The King in Yellow,' please do not bother too much about printing any more of the stories.

C. L. Moore, as ever, came through with a fine yarn. I have been a devout follower of hers for years. Some of the "Smith Stories" shall live in my memory forever. More of Moore.

May I suggest that Bok do more for F.F.M.? Have Basil Wells offer one of his short fantasies for your consideration. Have read no little of his "stuff" and have yet to read one of his tales which I did not care for. Give him a try—yes?

V. RALF HEINER.
225 SECOND ST.,
CALIFORNIA, PA.

"YELLOW SIGN" GOOD

"The Iron Star" is definitely not one of the best items ever to grace the pages of F.F.M. . . . but it is a strange tale, and one that is thoroughly effective. While occasionally veering towards the too-fantastic, at all times it remained well-written, well-plotted, and with an excellent atmosphere. I like the man's ideas—an interesting and provocative bit of work. Thanks to Taine for several hours of pleasant reading and subsequent rumination.

C. L. Moore's yarn is fairly good, but could have been far superior had it not been so top-heavy with description. There was simply a superfluity of the stuff, good as it may have been; it slowed down the action of the plot, and generally deadened the effect of the story. "The Yellow Sign," on the other hand, remains amazingly fresh and up-to-date after fifty years . . . a true classic.

More Taine and Chambers, along with an offering by Hodgson, would be welcomed.

Finlay and Bok continue to produce superb items with smooth efficiency.

BILL STORY.
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JAMAICA, 2, N. Y.

PAGING MYSTERIOUS "PANWIGE"

I haven't written you before, offering comments and suggestions concerning F.F.M., since the Munsey Publications, so please let me take this opportunity to do so. There were two letters in the Readers' Viewpoint of Sept. that were especially interesting, those of G. H. Laird and E. V. Albright. The feelings of

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these gentlemen, as expressed, are shared whole-heartedly by myself.

I feel that I am eligible to make some criticisms, since I have been for a long time an ardent supporter of practically all Munsey Publications. In my collection now, I have more than 1900 different issues, consisting of *Argosy, All-Story, Cavalier* and *Munsey,* to say nothing of complete files of *F.F.M.* and *F.N.* Although I still need several hundred issues to complete my files, I believe this to be about as fine and complete a collection, of its kind, as can be found anywhere. Be that as it may, here are my comments:

First, I don't think you have given the thousands of readers of F.F.M. a square deal, inasmuch as its splendid reputation was attained solely on the best classical reprints, and surely no better fantastic fiction can be found, as a whole, than that which has gone before, and in my opinion, can't be compared to the more modern stuff.

I do not mean that there are not a great many good stories that you can feature now, but rather that you have taken the attitude that the reprints we were enjoying before were forced on us as a terrible injustice to modern writers and you have taken it upon yourself to change all that. You will be congratulated by those who share your point of view, but I believe you will receive more bricks than bouquets before the arguments cease on this subject.

I was terribly disappointed when you declared yourself, in your first issue, as being opposed to reprints and advising us of your new policy to publish only new stories or stories that had never before appeared in any magazine. All this came fast on the heels of those swell promises that appeared in the last issue by Munsey. I looked forward eagerly to the appearance of those classics which were promised, but the fact that you have stopped the reprints will not hit me nearly as hard as it will a majority of your readers, because I already have most of the stories that were being published, in my files.

To give you an example of how valuable those old classical reprints were; recently I made a search for two issues of F.F.M. and all five of F.N., in order to complete my files of them. I finally found them, but the price was $1.00 per copy. The total cost of the seven issues new on the stands as they appeared was $1.00. Now, I contend that any magazine that increases in value so much over a short length of time must contain something very valuable. At this rate, what will these old issues be worth in the next ten or twenty years?

Now, my suggestion as to how to remedy most of the confusion. As it is now, you are giving us a magazine every three months or so. Why not make the magazine at least a monthly, thereby enabling you to give us some of the more worthy reprints along with these magnificent new stories that you are going to publish? If you can't find enough new material to publish every month, then I'm sure that the good old reprints will hold the magazine together during the two issues that could appear between the regular quarterly issues now. Or, you could publish a long new story in each issue, and where you have shorter stories now, you could give us a couple of reprints, in serial form.

If you accumulate too many new short stories, you could substitute several of them sometime when you were short on a new long story. This plan would help out a lot and would go a long way toward satisfying everybody. You might start out by using the classics that were promised us, then you could let the fans nominate different stories and having a vote to determine which reprints are published.

Just in case this letter is published, let me say that I am extremely anxious to contact the gentleman who writes under the name "Panurge" and who resided in Columbia, S. C., at the time his letter was published in a previous issue of F.F.M.. This gentleman is recognized by some as the No. 1 Argosy fan of all time. I do not know his address now, but I have happy recollections of a few days I spent with him about five years ago. How about it, Panurge, will you write me?

CECIL M. HINOTE.

BOX 786,
HAMMOND, LOUISIANA

A. MERRITT, PLEASE NOTE

Could you send me a list of available back issues of F.F.M. I have several holes in my files due to several copies being borrowed by a so called friend and returned looking as if a dog had been chewing it.

I think you could do well by thinking over your intention of running new stories as there are at the present several S.F. & F. mags of superior quality on the stands (two of them being put out by you). While you still have quite a few classics to go. So please make at least half your mag reprints.

Though I know I'm making myself an object of scorn to many of your readers my favorite story so far was not the "Moon Pool" or the "Blind Spot" but "Dwellers in the Mirage" although I agree with Ptarek as to the desirability of a sequel. (A. Merritt, please note).

DAVID AUSSER.

2370 ELDRIDGE ST.,
PITTSBURGH, PENNA.

CHECKING UP ON A. MERRITT

A few days ago I secured the latest issue of F.F.M.—and it's certainly a top-notch number. The selection of stories—including the novelette by C. L. Moore—is excellent. Finlay is his usual unusual self, and the new artist who illustrated "Doorway Into Time" is fine. Who is this artist, anyway?

"Three Go Back" will be very welcome, since I haven't been able to secure this book and haven't read it.

I notice the request for new material by A. Merritt. May I add my plea to the others? Unquestionably, since "The Moon Pool" appeared in *All-Story,* back in 1918, Merritt has been the unchallenged leader in the fantastic fiction field. Perhaps if he realizes how great

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a demand exists for his work he'll bestir himself and write something. . . . Why doesn't he complete the sequel to "Through the Dragon Glass"? According to an announcement published in 1932, Merritt was *working* on this novel. . . .

Then there's the sequel to "The Snake Mother" about which he hinted a long time ago; said he intended writing it. . . . And what about the novel he tentatively called "When Old Gods Wake"—a yarn laid in Guatemala, Yucatan and the Florida Keys? . . . And there was the 40,000 word yarn which Merritt was supposedly writing for *Sat. Eve. Post*. . . . Also "The White Road," a story of interlocking worlds on which he was working. Surely *something* should be done about all this super-fantasy!

A suggestion, and a change of subject. In September, Arkham House will publish a new Lovecraft Omnibus called "Beyond the Wall of Sleep". They announce that it will contain a novel titled "The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadeth", never before published. Why not check into this as a possible story for F.F.M.?

Still another suggestion. John Taine has in his possession four or five unpublished fantastic novels. Why not surprise your readers with a *new* Taine novel?

Luck!

L. A. E.

Editor's Note: The new artist is Lawrence. We shall ask Merritt a few questions.

A GOOD FRIEND OF F.F.M.

I finally located "The Lair of the White Worm"; it is being sent to you by mail. I would certainly like to have your reaction to this story. To me, Bram Stoker is no writer. His ideas and plots are fine; but his development of them is terrible—with possibly the exception of "Dracula." That vampire story is probably the only Stoker tale the average fantasy reader will remember. I think you will agree with me that a number of modern fantasy writers could have worked wonders with the idea in back of "The Lair of the White Worm."

The September issue of F.F.M. was splendid. Finlay did a fine job with his illustrations for "The Iron Star" and the combination of Moore and Finlay was superb. We hear far too little of Miss Moore lately. Can't you persuade her to be a regular contributor? Also, happy to see your occasional use of Chambers' stories. The "Yellow Sign" and "The Demoiselle D'Yys" were well selected.

H. C. Koenig.

Editor's Note: Mr. Koenig has lent us a number of fantasy books which are rare, including the long stories of William Hope Hodgson. "Three Go Back" was sent to us by Walt Liebsher.

REQUESTING "THE MASK"

It seems odd that I am writing you now. For several years I have been a reader and a critic of fantasy. Yet, for some strange reason your very fine magazine, F.F.M., has escaped my attention. I have seen it several times—yet, for some odd reason, a reason which I curse in futility at this date—I never got around to buying it.

To date, I have read three issues. The lead novel in each has been a masterpiece. "Ark of Fire" was by very far the best of the trio, while the writing and characterization of "Iron Star" made it appeal to me more than the fine plot, but weak writing of "The Golden City." At any rate, I was definitely pleased with all three.

As is customary, I have several suggestions to make. Since you have come under the wing of a new publisher—you have acquired a much broader field of classics to choose from. To this I say well and good. However, back in December, you told of preparing A. Merritt's "The Ship of Ishtar" for recent publication. Now, if it is at all possible to print this and several others of the better Munseys, I would suggest that you do so by all means. It seems unjust, cruel, to leave "The Ship" and those who have heard so much about it but who have not read it, dangling, so to speak, in mid air. If you were to take a poll on this, I am quite sure that the majority of the readers would favor the early reprint of Merritt's gem of fantasy. Whad'ya say, ed?

As to the "Complete Moon Pool". If the old timers don't like the idea of a reprint of this, you can still (paper shortage permitting), publish it in another volume, perhaps to be obtained by mail. As the fellar said, "They would sell like hot cakes." And, may I add—on a very, very cold day. . . .

Other reprints you might start thinking about (fer my sake, y'know) are any of the longer Binder novels of time gone by. Otto, we fans have heard, doesn't write fantasy any more. That, I fear, is a great, great shame. The only calamity that might prove harder for the fans to take would be the loss of The Happy Genius.

A reprint of some of the Burroughs novels wouldn't be bad, provided that they were used only once every four or so issues. If you do use the Martian Stories, do so chronologically. For, "Princess of Mars" leaves you off right in the middle of nowhere. "Gods of Mars" takes the tale on from there, and then, too, winds up in mystery—and so forth.

How's about some of the late Stanley G. Weinbaum's works. Positively will be mortified if we couldn't get Taine's "The Gold Tooth" . . . will settle, however, for "When Worlds Collide" and "After Worlds Collide" by—(sigh, the writer's name has gone and slipped my memory!). . . . With a sad moan, I realize that there is probably no hope whatsoever of you reprinting that immortal story, "Cosmos" which was written by almost a score of writers, round-robin style. Some of it, sigh, has already been published as separate stories. . . . If you plan on having some of your future novels done by modern writers, a) I suggest most heartily that *some smart editor* (why not yourself?) contact Abraham Merritt, and have him start thumping his typer once more. Or, b) persuade Otto Binder, the best of the moderns, to come out of

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the comics, and do a scopic yarn such as he alone is capable of creating. . . . A bit of E. E. Smith's old works wouldn't be a bad idea to get; yup, even if they are strict science-fiction; this, by the way (s-f) is the *better* half of fantasy.

One of the best of the undiscovered ones, I hear . . . the "King in Yellow" fine right now, will soon, however, outlive its usefulness. While all of the yarns therein are beautiful, some are not fantasy in the slightest form of the word. I would, however, suggest "The Mask", which, in my opinion, is the best story in the entire volume. Though, "Street of the First Shell", a most beautiful, non-fantastic story is written in a finer way.

MILT LESSER,
The Happy Genius.

2302 AVENUE O,
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

HARDLY ANY KICKS

Having finished the September *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* about a week ago, I felt that I had to write a few words to tell you how much I enjoyed it.

After a six-month wait, it was a treat to have our mag appear again! And with a full 144 pages. Swell!

Briefly, here are some things I liked in this September performance:

A. *All illustrations*
   I. *Finlay's cover.* Excellent! And the blue background was very nice. (I still like our mag's distinctive black background better though!)
   II. *Finlay's interior drawings for "The Iron Star."* Very good, particularly the full-page pic.
   III. *The drawing for "Doorway to Time."* What a resemblance to Finlay's work! Could you please tell me who the artist was? Why not give a credit line to the artist of each tale?
   IV. *Bok's drawings.* Really good—some of his best work!
   V. *Finlay's artwork for Nanek's poem.* A really beautiful piece—and, incidentally, much better than any of the interior pics he did for Merritt's novel, "Dwellers in the Mirage."

B. *The Iron Star.* Taine really held me in this novel! What suspense—plus originality! A good piece of science fiction! I liked the clever sarcastic tone that Taine used at many points! Let's have more of his novels!

C. *The Yellow Sign.* A very fine piece of work. The old-fashioned traces in the story were charming! The ending was worthy of a Lovecraft.

D. *Doorway Into Time.* A very good fantasy; new tales as good as this work of Miss Moore (Mrs. Henry Kuttner) certainly have a place in our mag.

E. Nanek's *Dwellers in the Mirage.* Very good—just what I've been asking for—capture the spirit of Merritt's masterpiece entirely!

F. *The Letter Section*—very mature and

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very interesting. You're really picking out the best letters! Stay away from the gooey, gushy type (like mine!)

Things I didn't like in this issue: Quarterly publication! And as for the trimmed edges—rough edges argument, I don't give a darn. If it's less expense to leave our mag untrimmed, let it be so.

Comments: Mr. Merritt recently wrote in answer to a letter of mine that he is going to finish another of his novels! Let's hope you can get it!

Next month's novel sounds fine!

Well—keep up the good work!

Your fan friend,
BERT INDICK.

45 PERSHING AVE.,
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ASKING FOR MERRITT

After all the delightful hours *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* has afforded, I feel absolutely despicable at being forced to begin my first letter with a complaint. But I feel that it's a justifiable one.

After the concerted protests from all the readers had forced Munsey to resume monthly publication of "F.F.M.," why on earth has it been switched to a quarterly? Your first two issues show that the magazine will retain its unusually high level of fictional and pictorial material; so you'd better start printing it *at least* once a month before a revolution arises in the fantasy field.

Complaint No. 2 (Well, a soldier's supposed to complain, isn't he?): *Argosy* reprints were the one thing that made F.F.M. the leading fantasy mag. within two months of its initial appearance and kept it there for four years. I have only a small collection myself, but I know that there are veritable treasures of fantastic fiction as yet even barely mentioned.

Why don't you at least alternate issues? It would be well nigh perfect to have one issue containing an *Argosy* classic and the next either a new fantastic gem or some famous but rarely found book. How about it?

That method would retain all the hordes of F.F.M. fans and would have the additional merit of attracting new ones who would perhaps prefer the book reprints.

Now I'd like to add another voice to the innumerable ones already acclaiming A. Merritt as the "Master of Fantasy." For sheer beauty of description, brilliancy of imagination, and creation of a truly unique atmosphere he has no equal.

There's nothing that could do as much for F.F.M. (and its readers) as to have a new Merritt novel appear here.

Now for a little critique of the current issue.

John Taine is certainly a gifted author, and "The Iron Star" is probably the kind of novel that won him his well deserved reputation. The chief flaw I find is that the plot is almost identical with the other two of his novels I've had the pleasure to read. However, the writing makes up for that.

C. L. Moore's short stories compare favorably with Merritt's. I was delighted to see

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THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

this one. "Doorway Into Time" was a little gem as to atmosphere and description, but the plot was rather too vague.

How about a supernatural yarn from C. L. Moore soon?

The Chambers story was interesting although definitely inferior to the first you printed.

The stories I would like to see first are "Last and First men" by Olaf Stapledon and "Jason, Son of Jason" by J. U. Giesy (if you start issuing *Argosy* again.)

Scientifanatically yours,
OSCAR G. BERRY.

"ARK OF FIRE" PERFECT

The other day a friend of mine with whom I trade magazines gave me a copy of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. It was during semester test week and as I had no tests for the rest of the day I started reading it. And I want to say here and now that "The Ark of Fire" was really a masterpiece. It occupied my attention and interest throughout the rest of the day and even an eighty-mile gale outside which was tearing off roofs and blowing over buildings could not completely divert me.

I have been reading science and fantasy magazines for quite some time and I can truly say that "The Ark of Fire" was one of the best stories I have ever read. If you continue to print stories of the same high quality you will have the best magazine in the field.

Best of luck,
JAMES TREECE, JR.
PARKERTON, WYO.

F.F.M. AND THE ARMY

S.F. is an appreciated luxury to me here in the army—the same as mail call always is, to the boys. Everything is so different here that one enjoys anything which brings back recollections of civilian life, which seems strange and far away. And, for that reason, the few times one has a chance to peruse stf. and read a current issue of F.F.M., are filled with a new, peculiar sense of strangeness.

The contrast is especially remarkable to me in that I appreciate both walks of life—that is, enjoy—civilian and military—and at the same time enjoy stf. as much as I ever did.

The Army is a pleasant life. It's healthy. There's no doubt of it, and any hardships one undergoes are compensated by a growing sense of well-being and appreciation of all the things one used to take for granted. Besides this, the fellows are friendly and good-natured, (at least, those in our company, and especially the four others in "our" particular "hutment") the weather is invigorating, full of Spring, and the hills all about are green and rolling. I don't see what more a fellow can desire, outside of the same environment and the same wonderful starry nights, in a time of real peace!

Meanwhile, I hope F.F.M. continues growing.

PVT. LARRY FARSACI.

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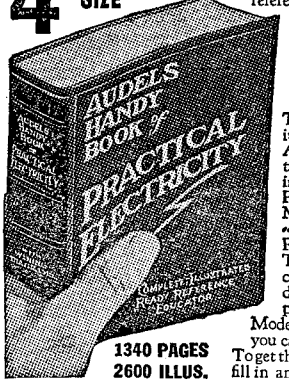

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FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

I've just finished reading the March F.F.M. Good Points:

1. Good symbolic cover.

2. "Into the Infinite" finished up very well; the conclusion was all that the Dec. issue said it would be. As my letter in the March issue said, I.T.I. is not as good as "The Blind Spot," but it is still deserving of being classified as a "classic." What a shame there are no more stories left by Austin Hall!

3. "The Ark of Fire." Truly a swell science-fiction tale. It really had its chills and thrills!! The story is really science-fiction and not fantasy, but any story as good as this certainly belongs in F.F.M. Finlay's drawings for "Ark of Fire" were disappointing—not well enough executed on the whole—and not enough of 'em! Is John Hawkins a pseudonym? It would be a nice thing if you could get some more science-fiction from this facile writer!

4. Right in tune with the war effort were your various ads for War Bonds! I liked the little cover ad for bonds and stamps. Popular Publications is certainly progressive.

5. I'm glad to see a story by the famed fantasy writer, John Taine (Prof. Eric Temple Bell, I believe of a California university). See if you can get some brand new stories from him.

6. Good!!! Another "King in Yellow" story. I hope it's as good as "Demoiselle D'Ys!"

7. The Readers' Dept. was quite interesting.

8. I'm glad to see the Editor's Page being continued. It is indeed something worthwhile in the book.

9. News of another Finlay portfolio is interesting, though I get my F.F.M.'s at the newsstands. I may get a regular subscription yet!

How about some illustrations by Paul? Maybe even a cover by him? Bok is O. K.

Suggestions: Cut out this quarterly stuff. Give us F.F.M. once a month.

Finally, please accept my complaints as suggestions given to *help!!* This is a good issue—one of your best—as for stories!

Yours for Victory,

BEN INDICK.

100 EASTON AVE.,
NEW BRUNSWICK, N. J.

"ARK OF FIRE" FAN

It is a rare thing to find a science fiction or fantasy story that is as enjoyable as "The Ark of Fire" was. The novel was expertly worked out, and the characters lived. I'll never forget Steven Hill, O'Day, Theta De Spain and the rest. Strange how realistic this story seemed to be; most science fiction, of the space story type, seems so improbable to me.

But, "The Ark of Fire" was different. The suspense never let down. I didn't read the novel all at once—it took me about two weeks at intervals to finish it. But I sure enjoyed it.

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THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

A HAPPY SUGGESTION

Raymond Washington, who, I believe, wished to have "The Ark of Fire" printed in F.F.M., is a personal friend of mine. He should be proud for having suggested a story that is printed in a nationally distributed magazine like F.F.M. Congratulations to Washington, Hawkins, and the editors.

The concluding installment of Austin Hall's story was very good; and how long has it been since I've seen art like Finlay's in fantasy! The drawing of the gold hoarder with Death hovering above is very impressive.

HARRY SCHARMJE.

318 STEWART RD.,
MUSCATINE, IA.

SATISFIED

Thank you for your reply to my letter to the editor of the unique magazine, *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. Referring to F.F.M. publishing reprints, I can only repeat that I will sadly miss the old classics of F.F.M. and yet I fully agree with your new policy (against reprints). I shall concentrate now on the new set of classics in F.F.M. and I am sure I shall enjoy them.

The only suggestions that I can offer to improve on F.F.M. are: Make it a monthly mag. (This is a must)—trim the edges—no poetry—no serials—have an editorial page and enlarge the readers' viewpoint page.

Again thanking you for giving us pleasant enjoyment in F.F.M. and wishing you the best of luck.

SYDNEY PLOTKIN.

SCRANTON, PA.

"INFINITE" ENCHANTING

I am very happy to see that Popular Publications has handled a delicate situation with tact. I am referring of course to the end of the Munsey Dynasty. I don't mind telling you fandom had some really bad moments there for a while, with the outlook of no more Merritt, or Hall, or Farley, or any of the other countless other greats who used to write for Munsey's. But all is apparently well with most others, because Julie Unger informed me, the first fan to know, of the sale of everything that was Munsey's. Incidentally, how about that new story Merritt promised F.F.M. some time back to take the place of "Woman of the Wood"?

Ah! The March issue is truly a fine one. Hawkins, in his story, gives an entirely new idea of a madman bent on destruction. Although I am only halfway through "Into the Infinite," due to the fact that I don't read serials until they are complete, I have found it enchanting.

As for the future, how about some of Haggard's works? Say, could it be that you are negotiating for one of his books? Thanks from the depths of my heart for keeping faith with

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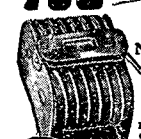

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VIRGIL UTTER.

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NO MONSTERS, PLEASE

The changes in policy announced in the March F.F.M. call for a letter. A long letter.

By far the most serious loss is A. Merritt. There is only one possible way in which this very real loss can be nullified. A. Merritt must write some new stories—or finish those three novels of his. Please, O Editor, ask (or beg) Merritt to come through with another of those enchanting novels. The fans, I know, are behind me on this. If it would help, we could get up a petition or sumpin'.

I am in favor of new stories occasionally, if they are truly exceptional in quality. Also, they should be either short stories or real novels—nothing less than 100 pages. Really good new novels are definitely wanted; I see a great future ahead for F.F.M. if you can give us the classics of tomorrow, written by such authors as Jack Williamson, A. Merritt, . . Smith, Eando Binder, Edgar Rice Burroughs, or any other good author.

Next, I don't like this quarterly business. Get Paul back. Taine's "The Iron Star" would, I think, be an excellent story for him to illustrate. How about it?

All the above was written in the desire to help; if I sound like one of those "do-what-I-say-or-else" guys, I'm sorry. But I want F.F.M. to be, as it always has, the true golden book of fantasy, and want to do all I possibly can to help keep it where it is now—on the top of the heap.

Policy having been taken care of, I'll move on to the March issue. And what an issue it was! "The Ark of Fire" was simply superb. It takes a real author to take a plot like that and weave such a powerful tale out of it; has Hawkins written any other fantasy? If he has let's have it soon. And if he hasn't—well, a new novel by him would certainly be welcome.

So much has already been said about "Into the Infinite" that more would be superfluous. Fascinating conveys the correct impression.

The cover: Ah-h-h!

The interior pix were, for the most part, up to Finlay's high standard, with the symbolic illustration on page 65 being one of the finest drawings I have ever seen.

The large "Readers' Viewpoint" is most welcome. Keep it that size. Speaking of letters, I see where my friend Gene Hunter wants "Dracula" and "Frankenstein." I am against this; keep fantasy in F.F.M., not those awful synthetic monsters and vampires that run through the above mentioned tales.

CHAD OLIVER.

3956 LEDGEWOOD,
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THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

"ARK OF FIRE" GREAT

I feel that it is time I commented on F.F.M., having subscribed for some time, now. I have never rated the magazine among others of the sort, for to me, it seems to be something above the usual type of fantasy magazine.

The first issue of 1943 is indeed a memorable one. I have just read "The Ark of Fire" and I now see why Raym should campaign so ardently for its appearance. It is truly a great story. Is it not strange that so many of the better fantasies are written by authors who do not often turn to that type of fiction?

I hope you can proceed with monthly publication once more.

By all means publish "The King in Yellow" in entirety, story by story. "Supernatural Horror in Literature," from "The Outsider and Others," with which you are undoubtedly acquainted, will furnish a guide to what else we want. The F.F.F. bibliography will also help.

Would that you could have staved off the change in policy until the publication of "Ship of Ishtar," and the rest of the Polaris and Palos trilogies. . . .

JAMES JOHNSON.

P. O. Box 1322,
ABERDEEN, S. D.

NEW SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

I am very much in favor of your change from printing old Munsey classics to printing science-fiction books. I admit that I enjoyed the first of these stories that I read but, after these first few they became rather boring. They all seemed to be pretty much the same. I don't mean that so much in plot as I do in the general atmosphere and writing style.

"The Ark of Fire" was completely different from your usual fare and I enjoyed it more than anything else I have ever read in F.F.M.

The cover wasn't the best Finlay has done, but it wasn't too bad. Same for the interiors for "The Ark of Fire."

"Into the Infinite" was every bit as terrible as the illustrations were good.

JACK GAVIN.

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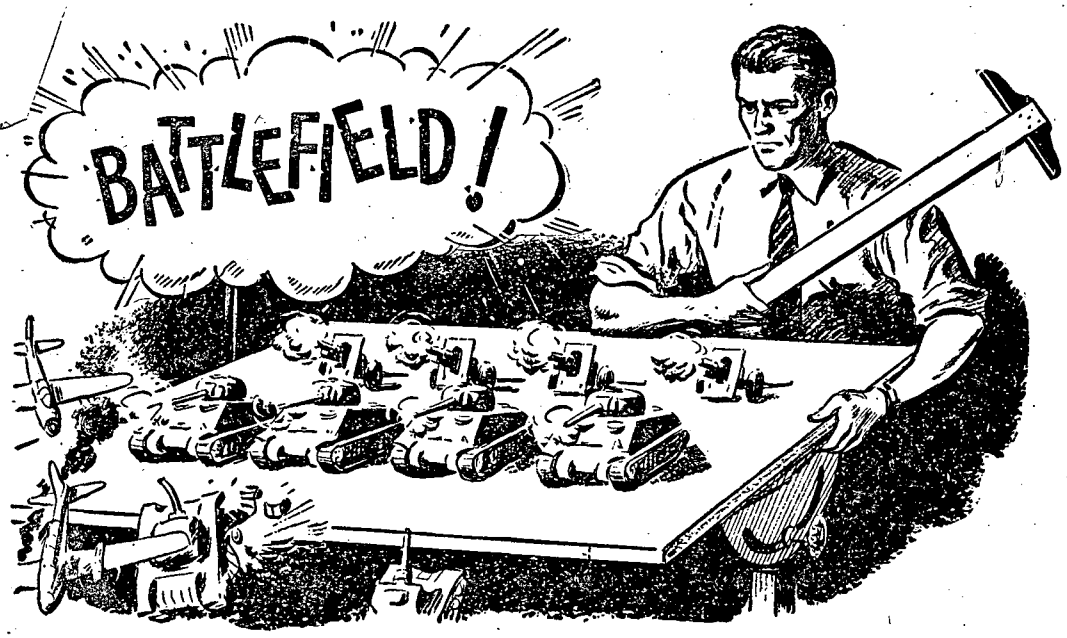

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HI
HATT

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